

# Statement On Latvia's Commitment To European Values And The Istanbul Convention: Since when are human rights up for debate?

The European Students' Union (ESU) and the Latvian Students' Union (Latvijas Studentu apvienība – LSA) express deep concern over ongoing discussions in the Parliament of Latvia (Saeima) regarding a possible withdrawal from the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence, commonly known as the Istanbul Convention. Such a step would mark a serious setback for Latvia's human rights commitments, undermine trust in European cooperation, and contradict the shared democratic and rule-of-law principles on which the European Union and the Council of Europe are built.

Latvia's ratification of the Istanbul Convention in January 2024 represented an important milestone in strengthening national protection against domestic and gender-based violence. The Convention provides an effective legal and institutional framework for prevention, protection, prosecution, and coordinated policy action, ensuring that nations work systematically to prevent abuse, support victims, and bring perpetrators to justice. Any initiative to reverse this decision would risk isolating Latvia from its European partners and send a worrying signal that international human-rights standards are open to political reconsideration. Protecting people from violence is not optional – it is a fundamental duty of any democratic government.

Latvia has a clear and ongoing need for stronger – not weaker – protective mechanisms for those suffering from violence. The Istanbul Convention enhances cooperation between law enforcement, education, social services, and civil society, ensuring that cases of violence are treated not as private matters but as

urgent societal concerns. A withdrawal from this framework would weaken the existing institutional safeguards and risk leaving victims without adequate support or access to justice.

Students and young people are directly affected by the social and institutional environment in which they live and study. A country that ensures academic freedom and protects its citizens from violence is one where students can learn, create, and participate freely and safely. Universities and student organisations have long been drivers of democratic culture and human rights awareness. By upholding the Istanbul Convention, Latvia affirms that it stands with the European community of nations that value human dignity, equality, and solidarity.

We therefore call on the Saeima of the Republic of Latvia to:

- reject any proposal to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention, to reaffirm Latvia's commitment to European values of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law;
- to continue implementing effective measures of prevention and protection in cooperation with civil society, education institutions, and the student community.

Latvia's future within Europe depends not only on economic development or security, but on its ability to ensure safety, justice, and dignity for all. Violence has no place in Latvia. Violence has no place in Europe. By standing firm in its commitment to the Istanbul Convention, Latvia demonstrates that the protection of every person's dignity and safety remains at the heart of its European identity.