

Joint Statement on the International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation

On the International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the Commission **Federica Mogherini**, Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, **Johannes Hahn**, Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development, **Neven Mimica**, and Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality, **Věra Jourová**, joined together to reaffirm the EU's strong commitment to eradicate Female Genital Mutilation and made the following statement:

"On International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation we confirm our firm resolve to put an end to this practice which is painful, traumatic and causes long-term health consequences. A practice that is nearly always carried out on children. A practice that is a fundamental human rights violation and an extreme form of discrimination against women and girls.

Despite the efforts of the European Union and its partners, 200 million girls are still suffering from this violation, which occurs in all parts of the world. It is estimated that the same number of girls are at risk of undergoing this practice by 2030.

In Europe itself, girls are still today subject to this illegal practice. The Commission works on its prevention by training professionals, such as judges, asylum officers or doctors who are in contact with girls at risk. We have put laws in place, to ensure that there can be no impunity in Europe for this practice. Female genital mutilation is a crime in all EU Member States and in most of them a person, who bring girls outside the EU to be mutilated can be prosecuted. Finally, the victims of such practices benefit from a high level of protection in the EU.

At the international level, together with the United Nations, we have launched an unprecedented initiative – the Spotlight Initiative – to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls. Through this initiative, we will focus in particular on our efforts to fight female genital mutilation in Sub-Saharan Africa, a region where this practice is still prevalent. Through these actions we provide direct and targeted support to the victims of such harmful practices.

The European Union will continue to work with all those determined to abolish female genital mutilation: parents, activists of all ages, including young girls, doctors, teachers, healthcare professionals, child rights and human rights advocates, judicial authorities, political, community and religious leaders and governments.

We will also continue building strong partnerships through bilateral, as well

as multilateral cooperation. All UN bodies and Special Representatives of the UN Secretary-General, all regional organisations – in particular the African Union – and civil society are our partners in the shared efforts towards a safer world for women and girls, which will lead to more resilient, peaceful and inclusive societies.

We want a society where women are free from violence and free to change the world.”

Background

Female genital mutilation/ cutting affects the lives and health of girls and women inside and outside the European Union, every day. Medical evidence shows that this practice can seriously impact many normal body functions, increases maternal and infant mortality, and can also cause lifelong trauma beyond the physical damages. Such forms of physical violence prevent women and girls from meaningfully participating in public life to the same extent men do. Female genital mutilation/ cutting has huge costs for societies.

Effective change to this practice requires prevention work at community level. This is why the EU is actively supporting social change in local communities, and networks operating regionally and internationally. We facilitate learning between stakeholders, including governments, on prevention, victim support, prosecution and asylum for victims, through providing methodologies on measuring prevalence and risk, and by offering practical tools for professionals via a web-based platform.

The EU also provides a continuous support to UNICEF – the UN International Children’s Fund – and UNFPA – the UN Population Fund – to accelerate change in 17 countries. This action is instrumental in accompanying partner countries to adopt national action plans and budget lines to put an end to the practice. At the same time, it provides support to more than 1.5 million girls and women to access protection and care services, and encouraging more than 3,000 communities representing 8.5 million individuals to make public declaration of abandonment.

We remain committed to the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which addresses female genital mutilation through its Goal number 5 on Gender Equality and specific target 5.3 on the elimination of harmful practices.

For More Information

To find out more about Female Genital Mutilation and what the European Union is doing to eliminate this practice, see the [Q&A](#) and the website of an [EU-wide training platform](#). To promote the platform and explain more about Female Genital Mutilation, the European Commission releases [a series of videos today](#): one for professionals and five short clips for the general public.

The [NON.NO.NEIN.campaign](#) (see #SayNoStopVAW) aims to share information and showcase success stories about the important work that is being done in this field across the EU.

[Spotlight Initiative](#)– a new, global, multi-year initiative of the EU and UN focused on eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls.

More information is available on the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) [website](#).

[Congratulations letter by President Donald Tusk to the President of Cyprus Nicos Anastasiades](#)

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[EU's cities and regions share European Commission concerns over Polish government's changes to laws on the judiciary](#)

□The European Committee of the Region has voiced its support for a decision by the European Commission to invoke Article 7 of the EU treaty against Poland, as there is “a clear risk of a serious breach of the rule of law”. In a resolution adopted on 1 February, the EU's assembly of local and regional

politicians noted that the concerns raised by the Commission – about the adoption of laws that it believes have resulted in the lack of an independent and legitimate constitutional review and judicial independence – are of “direct and immediate relevance” to local and regional authorities.

At the same time, the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) urged the EU’s decision-making bodies not to suspend EU funding for Poland’s cities and regions if the national government fails to address the EU’s concerns. The CoR said that local and regional authorities should not “be held hostage to policies pursued by national governments”.

Under Article 7 of the EU treaty, and with the support of 22 of 27 member states and two-thirds of the European Parliament, the EU could strip Poland of its voting rights.

The CoR’s resolution called on Poland and the Commission to engage in a “constructive dialogue”, warning of potentially “harmful spill-over” into debate about the future of EU spending after 2020. Polish cities and regions are major beneficiaries of the EU’s cohesion policy and its associated structural and investment funds.

The resolution was adopted at the first plenary of the CoR since the European Commission invoked Article 7 on 20 December 2017. The Commission has given Poland three months to address its concerns.

The eight-point resolution, which was passed with 77 votes in favour, 39 against and 26 abstentions, will now be sent to the Council of the European Union, the European Commission and the European Parliament.

Contact:

Andrew Gardner

Tel. +32 473 843 981

andrew.gardner@cor.europa.eu

Main topics and media events 5 – 18 February 2018

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Press speakings of Commissioner Jourová at a joint press conference on dual quality of food with Chair of Czech Parliament Agriculture committee Mr. Fałtynek

The Commission takes the issue of dual quality food very seriously and has drawn up an articulated action plan.

Since September 2017, when Commission President Mr Juncker, said in his State of the Union speech that we cannot accept the perception of second class consumers, we have done a lot already:

We adopted guidance on how to apply and enforce the relevant EU food and consumer protection laws. This is to assist national enforcement authorities to take the appropriate measures on a case-by-case basis.

I personally engaged in a dialogue with the industry concerned, both trade associations representing big brands and retailers and the largest European food producers – I had 4 meetings with them. I asked to stop unnecessary product differentiation practices, which do not correspond to specific market requirements. I stressed that consumers expect branded products to be the same wherever they purchase them in the EU and this is one of the key elements of brand loyalty. I stressed that they have to live up to their customers' expectation in this respect and should offer similar products across the Union.

The Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC), started to develop a harmonised testing protocol in close cooperation with the industry and all key stakeholders concerned.

I offered to co-fund the enforcement capacities of national authorities to

help them tackling the issue. Currently we are finalising the evaluation and award procedure for applicants. [unfortunately, there was no Czech institution interested in our grant].

This year, we will continue our plan:

The harmonised testing protocol should be ready by April. In May, a coordinated testing campaign should be launched with at least 16 EU countries (including or geographical corners and both small and large Member States) participating. The tests will involve the composition of a common market basket of products which are marketed in most Member States and will include chemical and sensory testing. We hope to present first results by the end of 2018.

And throughout 2018, we will continue supporting the Member States' efforts to implement existing laws, our 2017 Guidance, and the forthcoming harmonised testing approach.

In addition, I intend to address the issue as part of the overhaul of consumer law, which I intend to propose to the Member States and the European Parliament in April. We are calling it the "New Deal for Consumers" because we want to ensure that our good consumer laws, which we have in the European Union, are also applied in practice. For this purpose, I will propose to include new provisions in existing laws to ensure consumers can get redress when something goes wrong and that non-compliant traders are properly sanctioned.

Our "New Deal" will make it more difficult and costly for traders to mislead consumers in marketing dual quality products, which will be one of the examples of illegal practices.

When we will have completed these steps, I consider that the Commission will have accomplished its part in relation to dual quality food issue. It will subsequently be for national authorities to take up the challenge and to demonstrate that they also take the issue seriously. They should start to tackle the concrete cases that have been found on their national territory.

From mid-2018, we will also start looking into the need to extend our effort to non-food products such as detergents, a specific harmonised testing approach will be developed by our Joint Research Centre in 2019, drawing on the main principles of the food testing approach and on the lessons learned.

Now I would like to stress again that consumers are in the driving seat. They should be voting with their purses and refuse to buy products that they do not like or consider to be of lower standards. This is the best way to be heard by the manufacturers.

To some extent this already started and has produced tangible effects. Consumers' voices have made the market evolve: some producers have already voluntarily decided to change their recipes in order to ensure that the same products are sold across the Union.

- E.g. Bahlsen, The German producer of waffles and butter biscuits,

announced that they will start to use butter in all their products named butter biscuits.

- E.g. Hipp, a leading producer of baby food, will ensure a similar content of vegetables in their processed food across different countries.
- E.g. Ferrero announced it would modify the recipe for Nutella in Germany, the only country where it was different.