



Dimitrios Papadimoulis

Vice-President of the European Parliament

Head of the SYRIZA - Progressive Alliance Delegation

To the attention of:

Ms. Ursula von der Leyen

President of the European Commission

Mr. Charles Michel

President of the European Council

cc:

Mr. David Maria Sassoli

President of the European Parliament

**The Presidents of the Political Groups
in the European Parliament**

Athens, 8 April 2021

Subject: Unacceptable behaviour of the Turkish leadership towards the President of the European Commission during the visit to Ankara

Dear President von der Leyen,

Dear President Michel,

During your visit to Ankara and your meeting, on 6 April, with the Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, we witnessed an unprecedented insulting behaviour of the Turkish leadership towards the President of the European Commission and the EU in general.

Given that your visit was planned and, therefore, it was known in advance that both of you would be attending the meeting with the Turkish President, such an unacceptable and degrading, both for the EU and for gender equality, violation of the protocol can only be considered as a deliberate choice by the Turkish leadership. After all, at a similar meeting in the past, the then President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, sat next to the then President of the European Council, Donald Tusk, and the Turkish President.

As Vice-President of the European Parliament responsible for gender equality and diversity, I find it unacceptable that the President of the European Commission had to sit on an adjacent spot and not, as the protocol requires, next to the Turkish President along with the President of the European Council.

This deliberate choice by the Turkish leadership to violate the protocol can only remind us of the multiple reports of women's rights violations in the country and the very recent choice of the Turkish President to withdraw Turkey from the Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, amidst allegations by organisations that at least 300 women were murdered in 2020.

At the same time, this deliberate violation of the protocol is a clear move to degrade the European leadership, which is an insult to the EU as a whole. President Erdoğan's occasional contemptuous statements about the EU are well known, especially in the light of Turkey's ongoing violations of international law and the sovereign rights of two EU Member States, Greece and Cyprus, by Turkey, as well as the ongoing violations of human rights and political freedoms in the country.

It is regrettable that the reaction of the European leadership to this planned action to discredit the EU and the fundamental value of gender equality was below par in the circumstances, thus leading to undermining the very objectives of the meeting and creating a negative impression of the EU leadership.

We have been informed that the President of the European Commission has already requested, and rightly so, that this poor application of the protocol be investigated. Indeed, this degrading behaviour must be investigated to the end and proper explanations must be given. And it must be ensured that such behaviour is not repeated. The President of the European Council must contribute to this personally and through his own actions, in close cooperation with the President of the European Commission, as his stance at the time was not as the circumstances had demanded and his subsequent reaction remains lukewarm and unconvincing.

The unacceptable behaviour of the Turkish leadership during the meeting of 6 April shows that the Turkish leadership is even taking advantage of the application of the protocol to degrade the EU and the values it stands for, including gender equality. It is more than obvious that such behaviour cannot be tolerated under any circumstances and it must be made absolutely clear to the Turkish President that he must respect the EU, the European leadership, gender equality and human rights in general if he wishes to continue to be an interlocutor of the EU.

Yours sincerely,



Dimitrios Papadimoulis