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To:
Charles Michel
President of the European Council

Dear President Michel,

On April 10th 2021, you “conveyed to all women that you regret the situation”¹ which occurred in Turkey, now termed the Sofagate incident. While we welcome your statements, we think it is important to acknowledge that the incident is, among other things, an illustration of the struggles many women in senior positions face, even in the highest echelons.

You have furthermore stated “nothing could be further from the truth” than the impression that you are indifferent to the situation. Yet, for us, actions speak louder than words and it is the former that will shape your legacy as Council President.

This is why we deem it essential for you to commit to efforts to unblock the proposed directive on the presence of more women on company boards (COM/2012/0614 final). As you know, we are unable to make legislative progress on the proposed targets for women on company boards throughout the EU due to the lack of a Council position.

While studies have shown that diversity makes organizations perform better and is the key towards socio-economic development, too many Member States are still refusing to adopt measures aimed at improving gender balance in corporate boards.

In a recent letter (dated April 12th) on this very directive, Commission President Von der Leyen stated that “it is high time for the final step to seal the deal. Please be assured that the Commission is making every effort towards broader support of the proposed directive.”

She also emphasised that in the context of the pandemic “men have remained the majority of decision makers” and that “we must make sure that women’s voices are taken sufficiently into account when designing and executing the pandemic response.”

In Turkey, you played an unfortunate role in a situation that exposed the innate sexism of an autocratic regime. You have expressed your apologies and a wish to turn back time. That is, of course, impossible. However, you can help to advance and promote proposals that stimulate gender equality, a principle at the heart of the Europe we all must stand for.

We therefore urge you to publicly state your unequivocal support for the Women on Boards proposal and do everything in your power to convince those Member States that are obstructing progress to do the same.

Yours sincerely,

Lara Wolters – co-rapporteur on the 'women on boards' Directive in JURI
Evelyn Regner – co-rapporteur on the 'women on boards' Directive in FEMM

¹ Interview in ‘Het Financieele Dagblad’, April 10th 2021