

Emmanuel Macron, the French presidency of the European Union must be the one that stands for sexual and reproductive rights

Mr President,

France assumes its six-month presidency of the Council of the European Union on January 1, 2022. Europe remains divided on the issue of gender equality, despite this principle having been enshrined in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights for more than twenty years. The right to abortion, gender self-identification and sexuality education are human rights which stem from texts to which all EU countries are bound. In spite of this, several countries and conservative movements, who are opposed to civil and political rights, women's rights and the rights of LGBTQI+ people, are coming together to push a regressive, anti-democratic and misogynist agenda that runs counter to the values of the European Union.

While the mobilizations of Irish feminists and their allies led to the repeal of the ban on abortion three years ago, Polish women find their already extremely limited right of control over their own bodies under unprecedented attack. Italian women are battling "conscientious objector" doctors, and Hungary is institutionalising discrimination based on sexual orientation, banning any depiction of homosexuality to minors. Will the French presidency be the one to give unconditional support to the sexual rights of all?

The European Union has successfully made collective progress on numerous issues. Sexual and reproductive rights must not be the exception. France must promote both their inclusion in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and the ratification and implementation of the Istanbul Convention by the European Union and its Member States. The regulatory obstacles associated with European Union prerogatives do not justify inaction.

Sexual and reproductive rights have many defenders within the European Parliament, EU States and feminist movements. The challenge is to assert a certain vision of society.

The EU's political project must be one of societies which respect the sexual rights of all, of societies in which education about sexuality and consent is put into practice. It must not be about societies that moralise or criminalise our sexualities and our bodies. A French EU presidency that is strong on these issues would resonate worldwide.

France, which hosted the Generation Equality Forum in July, is piloting an international action coalition on the freedom to control one's own body. The French EU presidency must be the next major step in this commitment to sexual and reproductive rights.

Mr President, the eyes of the feminists of Europe are on you.