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From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations

Subject: High-level Webinar: Building safe digital spaces for women and girls - Click off cyber violence!
Information from the Presidency

Delegations will find attached the conclusions from the High Level Webinar on the above subject, with a view to the meeting of the EPSCO Council on 6 December 2021 (Any Other Business item).

High-level Webinar: Building safe digital spaces for women and girls - Click off cyber violence!

25 November 2021

On 25 November 2021, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, the Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the European Union organized a **High-level Webinar: Building safe digital spaces for women and girls - Click off cyber violence!**. The webinar was a good opportunity to address many issues related to cyber violence and harassment which is becoming ever more present in our society and to share mutual experience and best practices on how to build safe digital spaces for all, including women and girls.

In 2020, we have been faced with a new reality that has inevitably changed and affected all aspects of our lives, especially the lives of women, who have found themselves at the frontline of the pandemic. Data shows that since the Covid outbreak all types of violence against women and girls have intensified, while domestic violence and cyber violence experienced a notable increase. Therefore, in his speech, Slovenian minister Janez Cigler Kralj expressed the commitment to put gender equality at the heart of the post-pandemic recovery. Women and girls deserve to be put at the frontline also when it comes to their rights and well-being.

Furthermore, Commissioner Helena Dalli, stated: *“Our aim and commitment are clear. We want women and girls to thrive and lead in society and have new opportunities in the digital transitions. Women must be free from violence in all instances, including online. We must turn the COVID crisis into an opportunity for greater equality for women and girls, through action at the EU and the national levels, including the prevention and combating of all forms of gender-based violence and the implementation of the Istanbul Convention and existing EU policies.”*

Keynote speaker of the event was Ms Thordis Elva Thorvaldsdottir, journalist, equal rights activist and Founder and chair of the Nordic Digital Rights and Equality Foundation, NORDREF. During her speech she pointed out that:

“Europe is currently lacking a holistic framework to combat violence against women and girls in all of its forms, between member states as well as within member states. Online violence must be included in such a directive as a framework concept, including provisions for the criminalisation of specific forms of online violence, including but not limited to image-based sexual abuse, doxxing, sextortion, hate speech, sexual harassment and online stalking.”

Main conclusions:

- There is a political will to address and combat cyber violence and there is an understanding that a gender perspective in combating cyber violence must be addressed.
- Europe is currently lacking a holistic framework to define and combat violence against women and girls in all its forms.
- Online abuse is gendered, since it affects women and girls disproportionately. Applying a gender-perspective when writing and adapting existing laws that criminalize all forms of online violence is therefore necessary.
- The society has a hard time accepting that cyber violence is as real as physical violence; the research shows that there is no separation between online and offline world when it comes to violence against women. Moreover, often cyber violence leads to physical violence, when not properly addressed.
- Gender-based violence places large costs on the economy and on the society. The estimate cost of gender-based violence in the EU is 366 billion EUR each year, the cost of cyber violence is estimated at around 89 billion EUR each year.