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## **AFTER BULGARIA, SLOVAKIA TOO FAILS TO RATIFY THE ISTANBUL CONVENTION**

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The developments highlight widespread resistance among the more socially conservative countries of the former eastern bloc to the liberal values of wealthier Western Europe.

Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico yesterday said he refused to ratify the Istanbul Convention because he considers it at odds with the countrys constitutional definition of marriage as a heterosexual union.

Last week Bulgarian PM Boyko Borissov withdrew from parliament a motion to ratify the Istanbul Convention, faced with ever-growing opposition, first from its coalition partner, the United Patriots, the opposition socialists, and more broadly, with the population.

Just over half of the members of the Council of Europe have ratified the human rights watchdogs 2011 Istanbul Convention, which is the worlds first binding instrument to prevent and combat violence against women, from marital rape to female genital mutilation.

The Convention is the first international treaty containing a definition of gender as social roles, behaviours, activities and characteristics that a particular society considers appropriate for women and men □ according to Art. 3 of the Convention. Detractors claim that this opens the door to legalising gay marriage and promoting homosexuality in school by so-called promoters of gender ideology.

While there is no explicit mention of gay marriage in the treaty, many Bulgarians and Slovaks view its wording as a threat to the traditional family structure.

Borissovs GERB party is affiliated to the EPP, while Fico is the leader of the social-democratic party SMER, having been in power since 2012. The vast majority of Bulgarian are Christian Orthodox, while 62% of the Slovaks identify themselves as Catholics.

The convention talks about stereotypes and gender equality in the sense of eliminating the so-called traditional roles of men and women in the family. It raises doubts, Fico told reporters.

Unless there is full compliance with the provisions of the convention with the definition of marriage as a bond between a man and a woman, I will never agree to ratify.

Slovakias parliament amended its Constitution in 2014 to define marriage as a union between man and woman, which stirred protest among rights groups at the time.

Though against ratifying the convention, Fico said he was committed to incorporate some of its

elements into Slovakia's domestic law.

We will adopt all the necessary legal regulations to ensure that our legislation is at the European level when it comes to the protection of women against violence, he said.

Seventeen EU members have ratified the Istanbul Convention, along with non-members Albania, Andorra, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Monaco, Montenegro, Norway, San Marino, Serbia, Switzerland and Turkey.

<https://www.euractiv.com/section/future-eu/news/after-bulgaria-slovakia-too-fails-to-ratify-the-istanbul-convention/>

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