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June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2013

Members of Lithuanian Parliament  
Gedimino ave. 53  
LT-01109 Vilnius  
Lithuania

Dear Sir or Madam,

On behalf of ASTRA Network we are writing to you to express our deepest concerns about the draft law proposed by the Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania aiming to severely restrict access to legal abortion in Lithuania.

ASTRA, the premier regional network of non-governmental organizations from 19 countries of Central and Eastern Europe which advocate for sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and gender equality, strongly urges you to withdraw the draft law. Further, we urge you, in any future discussions about abortion legislation, to ensure that all key stakeholders, including civil society and women's rights organizations, be consulted and actively involved from the outset. We also urge you to guarantee that any law with bearing on women's sexual and reproductive health respect women's rights and include protection for informed and non-coercive decision-making, in compliance with regional and international human rights and medical standards.

Introducing barriers on women's access to safe and legal abortion services will not lead to diminishing the numbers of abortion but to a rise in illegal and unsafe procedures and also "abortion tourism," forcing Lithuanian women to seek abortion abroad. Traveling for abortion depends on the ability to afford such a procedure, which primarily will harm the most vulnerable groups of young women and women with limited funds, contributing to considerable health inequities. Banning abortion conflicts with women's rights to life, privacy, physical integrity and autonomy, confidentiality, health, and non-discrimination, as protected by the international and regional human rights obligations to which Lithuania has subscribed.

The Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania wishes to introduce a law on abortion which very strongly resembles the one which is currently in force in Poland, where abortion is legal until the 12th week when the pregnancy is the result of a crime, when the pregnancy poses a threat to the life or health of the woman and in cases of fetal malformation. According to

the yearly reports from the Polish Ministry of Health there were 669 abortions in year 2011 and not a single one resulting from rape. This figure, in a country of over 38 million inhabitants, illustrates how difficult it is to access a legal abortion in practice. The Polish Government constantly ignores the harmful effects of the current legislation. According to the results of the study conducted by a Polish public opinion research institute CBOS on over 3500 women, at least one-quarter, possibly up to one-third of women in Poland, have had an abortion at least once. This adds up to 4,1 million to 5,8 million women. As the 20 year long experience of the Federation for Women and Family Planning shows the effect of Poland's restrictive law is not the reduction of the number of procedures but the elimination of abortions performed in a safe, legal environment and rise in abortion tourism and abortion underground.

On behalf of ASTRA Network and the Federation for Women and Family Planning we urge members of Lithuanian Parliament to take all these issues into consideration and reject the draft law on abortion. We hope that the final decision of the Lithuanian Parliament will not worsen the situation of Lithuanian women with regard to their rights and health.

Yours sincerely,



**Krystyna Kacpura**  
Executive Director of the Federation for  
Women and Family Planning



**Marta Szostak**  
ASTRA Network Coordinator

**ASTRA Network members:** Albania - Albanian Family Planning Association, Armenia - Women's Rights Center, Armenia - Society Without Violence, Armenia - Women's Resource Center, Azerbaijan - Center "Women and Modern World", Belarus - Women's Independent Democratic Movement of Belarus, Bulgaria - Bulgarian Family Planning and Sexual Health Association, Bulgaria - Bulgarian Gender Research Foundation, Bulgaria - Gender Education, Research and Technologies, Bulgaria - Demetra Association, Bulgaria - Gender Alternatives Foundation, Croatia - B.a.b.e. (Be Active, Be Emancipated), Croatia - CESI - Center for Education and Counseling of Woman, Croatia - Women's Room, Georgia - Women's Center, Georgia – Hera XXI, Hungary – PATENT, Kazakhstan - The Legal Center for Women's Initiatives "Sana Sezim", Lithuania - Family Planning and Sexual Health Association, Latvia - Latvia's Association for Family Planning And Sexual Health, Macedonia – Shelter Center, Moldova - Reproductive Health Service Center, Poland - Federation for Women and Family Planning, Romania - Euroregional Center for Public Initiatives; Romania - A.L.E.G., Romania - The East European Institute of Reproductive Health, Romania - AnA: Society for Feminist Analysis, Russia - Novogorod Gender Center, Slovakia – Pro Choice, Ukraine - Women Health and Family Planning, Ukraine - Charitable SALUS Foundation, Uzbekistan – Future Generation, USA – Center for Reproductive Rights, Affiliated Member