



## CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN WOMEN'S NETWORK FOR SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS

### CEE Bulletin on Sexual and Reproductive Rights

No 08 (99) 2011

Table of contents:

- Burning Issue
- Regional Updates
- Global Updates
- Upcoming Events
- Publications
- Call for Action!

#### BURNING ISSUE

**Abortion-ban attempt in Poland.** On June 30<sup>th</sup>, the Polish Parliament debated a bill that would totally ban abortion in Poland, even if a woman's life were in danger. The left-wing party put forward a proposal to reject the bill during the first reading but the other political parties demanded the bill be referred to committee for consideration, and their proposal won by a vote of 261 to 155.. Most probably the committee will present a report on the bill to Parliament by early September. The draft bill, named "On the protection of human life from the moment of conception" - was initially submitted to Parliament in April 2011. The draft was prepared by the Committee of Legislative Initiative, a group fanatic opponents of abortion, known as an organizer of the macabre anti-abortion exhibitions held in the Polish cities. Poland's abortion law is one of the most restrictive in Europe and even more restrictive in practice than on paper. Although the law allows termination of pregnancy under three conditions - including for therapeutic reasons and when it results from a criminal act - legal abortion is actually not accessible even for women whose conditions fall under the exceptions. According to the annual report (2009) on implementation of the current abortion law ("Law on family planning, protection of the human fetus and conditions for legal abortion") there are approximately 500 (out of ten million women of reproductive age) legal pregnancy terminations a year. The newest law proposal is being debated by the Parliament, and the report is to be presented in early September. The leftist Democratic Left Alliance Party presented another bill calling for liberalization of abortion. However, the progressive bill will not be discussed by the Parliament during its current term. Parliamentary elections are scheduled for 9, October and it is

becoming obvious that abortion issue will be the main coin used to gain voters. Pro-choice groups are currently forming an initiative to push for a liberal bill introducing refundable legal abortion till the 12th week of pregnancy, funding for contraceptives and sexual education in schools. Poland is currently presiding over the council of the European Union, and the failure to reject this very restrictive bill on the very first day of the Presidency of the EU Council is a worrying signal to the international community.

Source: ASTRA Secretariat at <http://www.rhrealitycheck.org/blog/2011/07/11/proposal-complete-abortion-polish-parliament>

## REGIONAL UPDATES

**No over-the-counter emergency contraception for Hungary.** Hungarian Government decided not to allow sale of the emergency contraception over the counter. The decision means women will have to go to a doctor first in order to get prescription for the emergency contraception. Opponents intentionally confuse abortion pill with emergency contraception, and claim that the decision is consequence of the introduction of the paragraph on protection of foetus's life to the new Hungarian's constitution. Furthermore, the controversial decision contradicts the Government's claim to be aiming at reducing the number of abortions in Hungary.

Source: <http://www.nepszava.hu/articles/article.php?id=453505>

**Swiss initiative to defund abortion gains 111,000 signatures.** Swiss anti-choice groups have filed a petition with the Federal Chancellery calling for a ballot initiative to defund abortion. The petition was signed by over 100,000 supporters. The coalition claims that it is not seeking to ban abortion, which was decriminalized in 2002, but says that abortion should not be covered by basic health insurance. The text of the initiative requires that abortion be removed altogether from the benefits of basic health insurance, except in cases of rape or danger to the life of the mother. Current Swiss law allows for abortion within the first 12 weeks of pregnancy. However, the woman must show that the pregnancy is causing her "serious distress," and doctors must give her information on the physical and mental effects of abortion, as well as information on adoption. After twelve weeks, abortion is permitted if, in the doctor's opinion, continuation of the pregnancy would result in serious physical harm or "profound distress" to the woman.

Source:

[www.svss-uspda.ch/fr/suisse/opposants/initiative-financement.htm](http://www.svss-uspda.ch/fr/suisse/opposants/initiative-financement.htm)

**Russian President signs law mandating health warnings on abortion advertising.** The President of the Russian Federation has signed a new law that requires abortion advertisements to include health warnings explaining the medical risks associated with the procedure. The law also includes a stipulation that women who do not want to keep their pregnancy may consider using adoption centres. Signed on July 14, the new regulation will take effect in 30 days. Further restrictions on abortion are expected to be passed in the Duma in the autumn, including a two-week waiting period for abortion and a requirement for spousal consent. Also under consideration is a move to declassify abortion as a medical procedure covered by the state health system. Until the passage of more restrictions, abortion remains legal on demand, and paid for by the state, up to the 12th week of pregnancy.

Source: Russian Family Planning Association

**Pre-implantation' genetic testing approved by Bundestag.** A "pre-implantation" embryonic testing for genetic disorders was approved by German parliament. Members of Parliament voted

326-260 in favor of the bill, with eight MPs abstaining. Pre-implantation genetic diagnosis (PGD) extracts up to two cells from a human embryo obtained through in vitro fertilization for testing for severe genetic disorders that could result in stillbirth or miscarriage. The testing will only be permitted in cases where one or both of the parents have a history of serious genetic illness, and only after their case has been approved by an ethics panel. The testing is expected to be used in up to a few hundred cases yearly. The German parliament took up the debate after a federal court ruled last year in favor of the testing.

**Bill to outlaw dehydration euthanasia passed by Italy's lower house.** The lower house of the Italian legislature voted 278-205 to pass a bill that would definitively exclude the possibility of starving and dehydrating vulnerable patients to death. The Advance Directives Bill opens with a specific prohibition of euthanasia or assisted suicide and requires that patients not be denied food and hydration. The national debate in Italy over advance directives and passive euthanasia follows the dehydration death of a young brain damaged woman, Eluana Englaro, in 2009. Despite the law against euthanasia, Eluana's father, Beppino Englaro, fought for ten years through the courts to shorten his daughter's suffering. The case caused a national uproar when the Court of Cassation, Italy's highest constitutional court, in November 2008 ruled to allow the woman to die naturally in a nursing home that removed her food and hydration to cause her death. Under current Italian law, patients could refuse medical treatment even in cases where refusal could tend to shorten their lives.

Source: <http://www.corriere.it/>

## GLOBAL UPDATES

**Natural Human Rights Declaration.** Written declaration signed by 21 members of the Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe is not legally binding, it is just a declaration of these 21 representatives of PACE, almost all of them are members of the European People's Party. The declaration called "Natural Human Rights" is calling for protecting "right to life from conception" and "rejecting and condemning pressure to adopt laws that legalise or depenalise abortion".

For the full text of the declaration and the list of MPs who signed it go to: <http://assembly.coe.int/Mainf.asp?link=%2FDocuments%2FWorkingDocs%2FDoc11%2FEDOC12684.htm>

**UN Women Director Stresses Need for Women's Empowerment & Political Participation.** Dr. Michelle Bachelet, Executive Director, UN Women and former President of Chile, was a guest speaker at the 1<sup>st</sup> plenary of the 4<sup>th</sup> International Women's Summit organized as part of the World YWCA Council in Zurich, Switzerland from 12-13 July 2011. Ms Bachelet spoke in front of an enthusiastic crowd on the theme: Inequality, SRHR, HIV and Violence: The Nexus and Agenda for Women and Girls over the Next Decade ". Ms Bachelet highlighted that there is increasing and overwhelming evidence that investing in women and girls will address the social and economic issues that countries face, but that those in power are sometimes failing to invest in women and girls. She pledged to work with all UN Member States and all sectors of society championing the cause of women's empowerment.

Source: UN Women

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**The 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of “Our Bodies, Ourselves”.** The anniversary will be celebrated with a symposium featuring our global partners. Moreover the launch of the 9<sup>th</sup> edition of this classic book will take place in October.

More about how this book has been translated and adapted into 26 languages and how it has inspired critical policy changes to improve women's health and well-being is available at [www.ourbodiesourselves.org](http://www.ourbodiesourselves.org).

**EuroNGOs Strategy Workshop: *How to Advocate for SRHR when Aid is Decentralized?*** The workshop hosted by RFSU will take place in Warsaw, Wednesday, 12<sup>th</sup> October 2011.

To attend contact the EuroNGOs secretariat at [patrizia.pompili@eurongos.org](mailto:patrizia.pompili@eurongos.org).

## **PUBLICATIONS**

**Current status and directions for advancement of sexual and reproductive health and rights in Central and Eastern Europe.** “How to increase tangible political commitment to sexual and reproductive rights and health within the EU?” is the central question of the newest publication by ASTRA Network. The publication prepared as a follow up of the international workshop for SRHR advocates “How to address growing threats to sexual and reproductive health and rights in Central and Eastern Europe” that took place in April, 2011. ASTRA network was invited by MEP Eva-Britt Svensson to launch the publication in the European Parliament.

You can download the full report here:  
<http://www.astra.org.pl/Current%20status.pdf>

**Female Contraceptive Sterilization discussed during FIGO Executive Board Meeting.** The FIGO has issued recommendations regarding use of contraceptive sterilization.

More: FIGO - International Federation of Gynecology & Obstetrics  
<http://www.figo.org/news/new-download-new-ethics-guidelines-2011-003772>

## **CALL FOR ACTION!**

**Protest against abortion ban in Poland!** ASTRA Network has initiated a campaign calling on supporters to send a letter to the Prime Minister of Poland. The letter is [available at ASTRA’s website](#) and copied below. We encourage you to send your letter opposing this law to Prime Minister Donald Tusk, [donald.tusk@sejm.pl](mailto:donald.tusk@sejm.pl). We also ask that you send a cc: [federa@astra.org.pl](mailto:federa@astra.org.pl).

Sample letter:

*Your Excellency, I write to express my concern that the draft text for the new bill on abortion: “The law on changing the Law on family planning, protection of the human fetus and conditions for legal abortion” – to be discussed by the Parliament’s Committee by the 1st of September - contains provisions on that will result in violations of women’s sexual and reproductive rights and health. The international human rights standard is to liberalize abortion laws to make it safe and accessible to women and thereby lessen maternal mortality related to unsafe abortion. The language used in the draft of the new bill regarding the right to life does not correspond to that used in international and European human rights instruments – to which Poland is also party – as it unconditionally prohibits abortion, thereby leading not to lessening the number of women inducing abortion but only makes it dangerous for women who will undergo clandestine and unsafe*

*abortion. Passing the bill will increase maternal mortality, abortion-related injuries and deaths are likely to be especially high among poor women, who can't afford to travel abroad. As a result, many of them might try self-induced abortions. It is unacceptable that in the 21st Century, a European country includes in its legislation a provision which directly endangers women's lives. I trust that you will do your best to ensure that Poland considers reviewing its legislation regarding abortion in a forward-looking legislation, taking the lead in promoting women's sexual and reproductive rights. Sincerely yours,*

@@@ @@@ @@@

All issues of ASTRA Bulletin are available on: [www.astra.org.pl](http://www.astra.org.pl). To unsubscribe please mail to: [info@astra.org.pl](mailto:info@astra.org.pl). Please refer your friends willing to subscribe to ASTRA group to: [info@astra.org.pl](mailto:info@astra.org.pl)

ASTRA members: ASTRA coordination and secretariat: Albania - Albanian Family Planning Association, Armenia - Women's Rights 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, Gender Education, Research and Technologies, Bulgaria - Demetra Association, Croatia - B.a.b.e. (Be Active, Be Emancipated), CESI - Center for Education and Counseling of Woman, Women's Centre for Sexuality and the Prevention, Research, and Combating of Sexual Violence - Women's Room, Georgia - Women's Center , Georgia – Hera XXI, 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 - Sheltar Centar, Moldova - Reproductive Health Service Center, Poland Federation for Women and Family Planning, Romania- ECPI -Euroregional Center for Public Initiatives; Romania-Asociatia pentru Libertate si Egalitate de Gen - A.L.E.G., Romania -The East European Institute of Reproductive Health, AnA: Society for Feminist Analysis, Russia - Institute of State and Law, Russian Academy of Sciences, ANO "Women's Health", Novogorod Gender Center, Slovakia - Pro – choice, Ukraine - Women Health and Family Planning, Charitable SALUS Foundation.

Editorial Committee: Katarzyna Pabijanek, Wanda Nowicka, Agnieszka Walko-Mazurek.

Supported by: the Sigrid Rausing Trust Foundation and the International Women's Health Coalition

ASTRA Network Bulletin on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights 8/2011