



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

CEE Bulletin on Sexual and Reproductive Rights

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BURNING ISSUE

Attempts to change abortion regulations in Poland. Polish Parliament rejected two draft bills changing abortion law. Although the existing Polish abortion regulation is one of the most restrictive in the world, the civic initiative had emerged to introduce a total abortion ban. The draft law was first debated by the Parliament on the 1st of July and to dismay of pro-choice community was transferred to work in Parliamentarian Commissions for Health and Social Affairs. Although the draft had been rejected by both Commissions in mid-August it was not sure what would be the outcome of the plenary vote. On the 31st of August the draft introducing total ban of abortion was rejected. USUN The analysis of the votes shows that the dangerous provision was rejected by the majority of merely 5 votes. The second draft bill was presented in the Parliament by the left wing Social Democrats as a response to the ban proposal. It has been based on the draft law prepared by the Federation for Women and Family Planning and it aims at introducing abortion on demand and facilitating women's access to reproductive health services. It was rejected by the vast majority of Parliamentarians after the first reading. On the 1st of September the new civic initiative was presented. It is called TAK DLA KOBIET (Yes For Women) and it is currently promoting its new draft bill entitled "Law on responsible parenthood and other reproductive rights". It stipulates abortion on demand up to 12th week, and changes current provisions regulating access to sexual and reproductive health services. The initiative has now to collect 100 000 signatures to proceed with the project. After the signatures are collected, the draft will be debated by the Parliament.

Source: Federation for Women and Family Planning

REGIONAL UPDATES

Women's reproductive rights are in grave danger in Russia. Russia's current law guarantees the right to abortion. Yet in reality, over the last several years, this right has been slowly but steadily undermined in practice, and now the forces behind that have attacked the very right itself, seeking to limit the current law dramatically. By Russian law, a woman can ask for an abortion on request up until 12 weeks of pregnancy. Between 12 and 22 weeks, an abortion can only be performed on the basis of medical or so-called "social" reasons laid out by the government. Over the years, the government had reduced dramatically the number of reasons of both kinds, for instance, eliminating the right to perform a second-trimester abortion in case the parents are unemployed. These limitations has been done under a pronatalist pretext, though in practice the share of abortions conducted for medical or social reasons has never risen much higher than 2% and 3% of all abortions, respectively. Currently a group of Parliamentarians teamed up with a number of antiabortion, anti-sexual education, anti-modern contraception activists, mostly coming from the Russian Orthodox Church, which carries a lot of political clout these days. Behind closed doors, the commission reviewing Russia's abortion legislation has worked for a year and a half on measures to restrict women's access to abortion which would take away her rights to determine whether to undergo an abortion and give it to her husband or her "legal guardian", and medical and government authorities. At the same time some the commission members, tried not ask for too many drastic changes in the current law all at once, even though some members have publicly announced, at Christian events, for example, their desire to outright ban all abortions in the country. The measures proposed by the commission include the following: married women will have to obtain a permission from their husbands to perform an abortion; teenage mothers, from their parents or legal guardians. A waiting period of one week will be instituted during which the woman seeking an abortion will have to endure obligatory "psychological consultations", mandatory viewing of ultrasound and listening to the embryo's heartbeat. The stated purpose of these obligatory procedures is to pressure the woman into changing her mind about the termination of her pregnancy. Social reasons to undergo an abortion after 12 weeks of pregnancy, such as the husband's death during the pregnancy will be eliminated, with the only remaining social reason being a pregnancy resulting from rape. Permission for doctors to decline performing abortions on their whim with no oversight mechanism and no guarantee that women will be able to obtain lawful services. Introduction of an informed consent form which warns women of so called 'serious risks' associated with abortion. The abortion amendments are likely to be introduced to the new version of the Health Law that is currently being debated by the Russian Parliament. If adopted, the proposed changes to the current law will significantly limit women's access to abortion, and will be likely to cause the rise of criminal abortions (which even under current, less restrictive law cause up to 5% of maternal deaths in Russia.) They will compromise the autonomy of women, and will be a major setback to women's rights to exert control over their bodies and their lives.

Source:

Russian Association for Population and Development Coalition "For Choice!"
info@ranir.ru; www.ranir.ru

UK Ministers back anti-abortion lobby reforms. The Department of Health confirmed yesterday that it would change the rules to ensure abortion counselling was offered "independently" of clinics that conduct terminations. Its announcement was made in advance of an attempt next week led by the Tory backbencher Nadine Dorries to amend the health and social care bill to force such a requirement. Dorries says that the charity-run abortion services - including the British Pregnancy Advisory Service (BPAS) and Marie Stopes - have a financial conflict of interest in advising

women seeking terminations. She says that by offering independent counselling, 60,000 of the 200,000 abortions each year could be prevented. The charities say that another layer of counselling could cause distress by delaying access to abortions. They also say that the counselling they offer is continuous throughout the process of seeking a termination and that there is no evidence they are biased in the care they provide. The Department of Health confirmed that it would move to change the rules and said it was consulting on the precise method to use, with sources acknowledging that it was a direct response to lobbying from backbenchers. Dorries launched her campaign for the change alongside Frank Field, the Labour MP. They are backed by the campaign group Right to Know, which has set up a website and Facebook page. Dorries, a former nurse who says she is campaigning on the issue after witnessing botched terminations, says she does not oppose abortion. However, she has previously campaigned to reduce the abortion time limit and said last night that her explicit aim was to reduce the number of terminations, claiming that 60,000 could be prevented each year if women were given independent advice. The health and social care bill is due to be debated in the Commons next week, and a decision on whether to select the amendment will be taken on 6 September.

Source: The Guardian (UK)

GLOBAL UPDATES

HPV test may be better predictor of cervical cancer than pap smear. HPV is the most common sexually transmitted infection, and certain strains of the virus can cause cervical cancer. Under cervical cancer screening guidelines issued by the American Cancer Society in 2002 and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists in 2003, women aged 30 or older should have both a Pap test, also known as a Pap smear, as well as an HPV test, also called an HPV co-test. Under current guidelines, if the results of both tests are normal, a woman can wait three years for her next Pap test, which looks for signs of cancer in cells from a woman's cervix. A new study indicates that test that detects the two strains of human papilloma virus (HPV) that are most likely to raise the risk of invasive cervical cancer, when combined with the Pap test, may be more accurate for many women than the Pap test alone. The study is published online Aug. 22 in *The Lancet Oncology*.

Source: USA Today at <http://yourlife.usatoday.com/health/medical/womenshealth/story/2011-08-23/HPV-test-may-be-better-predictor-of-cervical-cancer-than-pap-smear/50105814/1>

UPCOMING EVENTS

EuroNGOs SRHR and Development Cooperation Conference Deadline Extended. The deadline to register for the “Future Perspectives on Development Cooperation – Putting SRHR on the Right Track” EuroNGOs Conference and AGM, from 13th-14th October 2011 in Warsaw, Poland, has been extended until the 9th September 2011. September 2011.

More: <http://www.eurongos.org/Default.aspx?ID=27466>

Sustainable Societies, Responsive Citizens- Cairo meets Rio in Bonn! The 64th Annual UN Department of Public Information NGO Conference will be held in Bonn, Germany, from 3rd-5th September. The theme is “Sustainable Societies, Responsive Citizens”.

More: <http://www.un.org/wcm/content/site/ngoconference/>

The 11th International Meeting on Women and Health (IWHM), scheduled to take place on the campus of the Free University of Brussels (ULB - campus Solbosch) from September 13th to 17th.

For more information on the event go to the website:<http://www.11rifs.org/>.

PUBLICATIONS

EPF's Brief on Antichoice Initiatives in Europe. Opponents of sexual and reproductive health and rights have been active across Europe in the first semester of 2011. The European Parliamentary Forum on Population and Development (EPF) has produced an overview of antichoice initiatives across Europe from January - August 2011.

Access the intelligence brief here: <http://www.epfweb.org/epf-news/35/intelligence-brief--overview-of-antichoice-initiatives-across-europe-january--august-2011/>

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