



## **CEE Bulletin on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights**

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### **BURNING ISSUE**

#### **Romania Vying with Poland and Hungary to Ban Gender Education**

Vying with Poland and Hungary, the Romanian Parliament adopted an amendment to the National Education Law seeking to prohibit information on gender identity in schools, universities and other educational spaces. The amendment positions gender as an ideological invention and bans "theories and opinion on gender where it is a separate concept from biological sex". The amendment would ban teachers, school counselors, academics, doctors, social workers and non-governmental organizations from discussing topics related to gender, gender equality or transgender issues. It outlaws "sex proselytism" and "proselytism" in favour of "gender ideology": only biological sex exists, gender is an ideological invention. This would have a significant impact on academic freedom, the

provision of CSE, transgender peoples' rights and women's rights including survivors of gender-based violence.

Romanian academics, students and human rights groups have condemned a new law banning gender identity studies in schools and universities and accused lawmakers of wanting to send the country's education "back to the Middle Ages". Several higher education institutions have harshly condemned the legislation, including the University of Bucharest, saying that "it contradicts fundamental rights guaranteed by the Romania Constitution and international conventions of which Romania is a party to".

As a result of the turmoil created around this hot topic, numerous organizations consider that the Romanian Parliament makes a serious interference on several rights and fundamental freedoms, unjustifiably marginalizing a category of vulnerable groups. Given these concerns, the NGOs, including Romanian ASTRA members, have asked the President of Romania to send the bill for re-examination to the Romanian Parliament and, if necessary, to challenge the normative act to the Romanian Constitutional Court.

The legislation would have to be approved by President Klaus Iohannis, but he has announced that he will not sign the bill, but either send it back to parliament for revision or challenge it with the constitutional court – as he did for the amendment to ban sexuality education without parental consent.

Lots of advocacy actions have been taken by friendly European organizations, such as:

- ASTRA members have supported their Romanian colleagues' in their advocacy
- EPF coordinated a letter by MEPs for SRR and MPs across Europe. MEPs from the LGBTI Intergroup also sent a letter to the President.
- IPPF EN has signed a letter (attached) to the President along with other European NGOs
- There was a protest in front of the presidential palace: *'People carrying banners and wearing masks — some with an "x" taped across them — attended an hour-long rally outside the official residence of President Klaus Iohannis, calling on him to refrain from signing the bill and send it back to parliament. The flash mob was attended by over 150 persons who took great personal risk, as protest activities are banned in Romania during the pandemic and all participants risk steep fines'.*
- A strong and very well documented letter was sent by Ms Genoveva Tisheva- International expert on Gender equality and Women's Rights, Director of the Women's Human Rights

Training Institute, Member of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women /CEDAW/, Chair of the Working group on GBV against women, appealing to the Romanian president to not allow the Law 87/ 17.02.2020: containing a Proposal to modify and complete the Law Regarding National Education nr.1/ 2011 to be passed and promulgated in Romania.

This article was provided by [ASTRA Network's Advisory Board member](#) and representative [of ANA Society for Feminist Analysis](#), Daniela Draghici

## REGIONAL UPDATES

### **Slovak Parliament to discuss 4 bills restricting access to abortion in July**

Slovak Parliament is set to start new session on 7 July, which is scheduled to run until 17 July.

4 new legislative proposals aimed at restricting access to abortion have been registered to be discussed and voted upon during the July session.

The bills will be discussed in the first legislative reading and later a vote will decide whether each of them will move to a second reading, which will most likely take place in September, as there is no scheduled sitting in August.

The first bill, proposed by the leading parliamentary party and rumoured to be most likely to be moved to the second reading, proposes a number of amendments into various laws. Among the changes would be a prolongation of the mandatory waiting period from 48 hours to 96 hours, extension of information to be collected for statistical purposes (to include a reason for having the procedure and detailed description of domestic situation), a requirement that abortions on health grounds and abortions on the grounds of fetal impairment can only be provided upon obtaining two medical opinions attesting the grounds and introduction of a ban on informing of providing abortion services.

The second bill, proposed by the opposition, would force medical professionals to perform an ultrasound and show it to the pregnant person before obtaining consent for the procedure, introduce an entitlement to receive a sickness benefit starting from the 21<sup>st</sup> week of pregnancy if a woman decides for an anonymous birth and exclude women over 40 from the public health insurance's coverage of abortion.

The third bill, proposed by a right-wing opposition party, would ban abortion on request altogether and prohibit to provide abortion care to foreigners (except from the situation of life being at risk).

The fourth and final bill, proposed by the same right-wing opposition party, would lower the limit for having an abortion on request from 12 weeks to 8 weeks of pregnancy and prohibit providing abortions to foreigners altogether.

As ASTRA's source on the ground tells us: *The Slovak civil society is organizing a number of domestic advocacy activities aimed at members of the Slovak parliament, asking them to reject the bills in the first reading. This includes a legal analysis of the bills that will be provided to the parliamentarians and the engagement with Slovak media. Coalition Nebudeme ticho! (We won't be silent!) are also organizing a public protest against the bills in Bratislava on 7 July.*

ASTRA Network will inform of further developments in this case.

### **Croatian women show the middle finger to abortion remarks**

Croatian politicians were left in no doubt about the strength of feeling on the subject of abortion in the country, after remarks in pre-election debates prompted a backlash visualised by perhaps the most defiant gestures of all - the middle finger.

Miroslav Skoro of the Homeland Movement and Goran Jandrokovic of the ruling Croatian Democratic Union, both right-of-centre political forces, agreed on the issue in a TV programme ahead of the parliamentary election in July.

"In my opinion life begins at conception and should be protected", Mr Jandrokovic said, arguing that "we should work on education to reduce abortions to the smallest possible number".

The reaction was swift and took the form of a body-language salute by many prominent women, supported by men, to convey the offence caused.

Among the first to post an image of herself and her middle finger was the deputy mayor of the Croatian town of Osijek, Zana Gamos.

"My dear, here is a lady's response to the gentlemanly thinking of geniuses who have advice about what a raped woman should do. Go get some advice!", she posted on Facebook along with [#mistressofmyownbody](#).

Former President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic also used the gesture to express her feelings: "I am joining all the women who are [showing their stance with this 'impolite' gesture](#) and raising their voice against those trying to take us back centuries. The times when a woman sat in the corner and waited for what the 'guy' would say are well and truly gone."

Abortion is legal in Croatia but there are fears it is becoming less available under pressure from the Catholic Church and activists.

After the Constitutional Court gave the government a two-year deadline in 2017 to draft a bill outlining new regulations on the right to abortion, as the current law drawn up in former Yugoslavia has been in force since 1978, the bill is still being debated in parliament.

Recommendations by a working group which looked at the legal framework in other EU countries include [safeguarding a woman's right to abortion](#), possibly increasing the deadline for termination from the current 10 weeks to 12 weeks, and enshrining the conscientious objection in law.

The abortion rate in Croatia has fallen considerably, from over 25,000 in 1993 to 2,558 in 2018, something that has prompted concerns about the erosion of women's rights.

This update is an excerpt from a [BBC](#) article.

### **Polish president pledges to “defend children from LGBT ideology” ahead of election**

Poland’s president, Andrzej Duda, has published a set of pledges to support Polish families if he wins a second term in elections later this month. Among his promises is to “defend children from LGBT ideology”.

Duda also promises to ensure that families remain safe (from threats such as domestic violence and pornography) and that the labour market is more adapted to the needs of parents, including making it easier for women to return to work after maternity leave.

Two sections of the Family Charter relate to LGBT issues. One pledges to “defend the institution of marriage”, which Duda says must remain defined as a “relationship between a woman and a man”.

The charter also says there can be “no consent for the adoption of children by homosexual couples”. At an event today in a playground to launch the charter, the president described such adoptions as part of a “foreign ideology”, reports TVP.

Another section is titled “defence of children from LGBT ideology”. It promises to “ban the propagation of LGBT ideology in public institutions” and to protect parents’ rights to decide on how their children are educated. In particular, it emphasises that “parents are responsible for sex education”.

Many self-proclaimed opponents of “LGBT ideology” in Poland are also against the expansion of sex education in schools (something Trzaskowski has sought to do in Warsaw). They [argue](#) that such classes are used by LGBT groups to “sexualise children” and even [prepare them for abuse](#).

A large number of Polish local authorities, mostly under PiS control, have [declared](#) themselves “free from LGBT ideology”. Last week, the European Commission [wrote](#) to the heads of five Polish provinces requesting an explanation for such actions.

The situation has led Poland to now be ranked as the worst country for LGBT people in the European Union in an annual index published by ILGA-Europe, a Brussels-based NGO.

This is a shortened version of an article from [notesfrompoland.com](https://notesfrompoland.com)

### **Montenegro becomes first country in Balkans to legalise same-sex civil partnerships**

Montenegro has become the first European country outside both Western Europe and the EU to legalise same-sex civil partnerships.

A new bill passed on Wednesday gives same-sex couples equal legal rights as heterosexual ones except for child adoption.

Forty-two MPs voted in favour of the law in the capital Podgorica, while five were against it.

The LGBT Forum Progres group said the bill has "unspeakably tremendous importance for all LGBT persons in Montenegro".

"I honestly didn't think it would and I still can't come to my senses that this happened in Montenegro," tweeted John Barac, executive director of LGBT Forum Progress.

The bill was first rejected in August 2019 after being met with strong resistance by the Serbian Orthodox Church, the largest religious community in the country.

Montenegro's government had hoped the law would be approved to push forward with efforts to join the European Union. Improving the rights of minority groups has been seen as a necessary step for the EU integration process.

Prime Minister Dusko Markovic described the move on Twitter as "a great step in the right direction for Montenegrin society, its democratic maturity and integration processes".

"There can be no room for discrimination based on sexual orientation in a European Montenegro".

President Milo Djukanovic [added on social media](#) that the law was "one step closer to joining the most developed world democracies".

Montenegro has been a predominantly conservative society where LGBT communities have often faced harassment.

"A big step has been taken towards equality, but the road to real equality is still ahead of us," Jovan Ulicevic, director of the Spektra association, told AFP.

"We are continuing the struggle to ensure that everyone in society is respected".

Source: [euronews.com](http://euronews.com)

## FROM ASTRA MEMBERS

### **The Reproductive Health Training Center of Moldova has become accessible for all**

On June 25, 2020, specialists from The Association "MOTIVATIE" of Moldova facilitated a second monitoring visit to the Reproductive Health Training Center (RHTC) of Moldova in order to examine accessibility modifications made to its new office space.

On May 21, 2019, “MOTIVATIE” carried out an evaluation of RHTC’s new space and provided recommendations aligned with construction norms and standards (later on, with a project draft for the installation of an entrance ramp) for ensuring accessibility.

As part of the second visit, specialists from “MOTIVATIE” concluded that the access ramp was installed, the doorways were widened, and the restroom was renovated, all in conformity with current accessibility norms.

“MOTIVATIE” is grateful to RHTC for being open and taking the initiative to ensure that its new office space is accessible to all people of all abilities. We hope that other institutions will follow RHTC’s example.

Source: [The Association “MOTIVATIE” of Moldova](#)

### **Sexuality education in Romanian schools: what’s happening between now and September?**

The law that censors the access to sexuality education in schools, Law 272/2004 regarding the protection and promotion of children’s rights, introduced on the Chamber of Deputies agenda stealthily and voted in Parliament hastily, was sent to the President of Romania to be promulgated. Let us remember that it was a counter reaction to Law 45/2020 that had already been promulgated by the president on April 3, which is sanctioning compulsory education classes at least twice per semester.

Dozens of NGOs and thousands of individual activists wrote to President Klaus Iohannis asking him to reject the changes whereby access to sexuality education in schools is to be restricted pending on parents’ written consent and replaces “sexuality education” with “sanitary education” that used to be taught during communism. We also wrote to the parliamentarians who avoided talking about the real problems generated by the lack of this type of education in schools and focused on children’s access to porn movies, despite the fact that Romania boasts the highest adolescent pregnancy rate in the EU, vying with neighboring Bulgaria. The parliamentarians complained they were “assassinated” online.

As a result of the sustained advocacy actions, the presidential administration responded to the many letters we sent, including mine, announcing the fact that the President of Romania sent a notification of unconstitutionality to the Constitutional Court on June 24.

In response to the President’s notification, the Constitutional Court judges have set the trial term for September 16.



The Coalition for Gender Equality that includes several ASTRA member organizations, including AnA Society for Feminist Analyses, represented by myself and A.L.E.G / Association for Liberty and Gender Equality decided to conduct a hot summer-long advocacy campaign to keep people abreast of the utmost importance of protecting school students' right and access to sexuality education.

### **An update from a Romanian human rights conference**

AnA Society for Feminist Analyses was a partner of the Conference Romania, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe in the New World (Dis)Order, organized by the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (SNSPA) in Bucharest on 5th March 2020. The conference benefitted from the support of the Black Sea Trust of the German Marshall Fund of the United States.

The conference was an all-female panel event, with the aim of bringing together relevant women experts in a diversity of areas: economic development, security, defense, globalization and technology, illiberalism, migration, etc., so as to offer them the opportunity to publicly contribute to understanding economic and political changes on a regional, European and international level, during this period of apparent world disorder. This conference was meant to balance out the general absence of women specialists in conference/ broadcast panels, which may give a false impression about the lack of women's expertise.

AnA Society for Feminist Analyses took part in the organization of the event and will coordinate and publish a special issue of Analyze Journal with contributions presented at the conference. Also, Mihaela Miroiu, a founding member of AnA, co-facilitated the round table "How can the expertise of women be valued more in our societies?".

Two inputs above were provided by [ANA Society for Feminist Analysis](#)

## **RESOURCES**

### **A new report on Moldova published by Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Dunja Mijatović**

The Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Dunja Mijatović, published a report on her visit to the Republic of Moldova in March this year – which included travel to Comrat (Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia) and Tiraspol - with recommendations on violence against women and

domestic violence, children's rights, the human rights of persons with disabilities, Roma, hate speech and the rights to housing and health.

The report is available [online](#) (in English).

Source: [coe.int](http://coe.int)

## UPCOMING EVENTS

*Due to global epidemic of COVID-19, all upcoming events requiring physical interactions have been cancelled or indefinitely postponed. Other events are mostly organised online, usually as webinars.*

### **An Inroads Webinar and funding opportunity**

As Inroads write on their Facebook page:

*Join us for our webinar answering questions about how to participate in our Technical Assistance program, and apply for COVID19 emergency funding. See you this Wednesday July 8 @ 7 PM GMT/ 2PM CDT. Register here:*

<https://attendee.gototraining.com/r/3812928612133346050>

Source: [Inroads Facebook Page](#)

ASTRA Network Members: Albania - Albanian Family Planning Association; Armenia - Society Without Violence; Armenia - Women's Resource Center; 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; Bulgaria - Gender Education, Research and Technologies; Bulgaria - Demetra Association; Bulgaria - Gender Alternatives Foundation; Bosnia and Herzegovina – Sarajevo Open Center; Croatia - B.a.b.e.; Croatia – CESI; Croatia - Women's Room; Georgia – HERA XXI; Georgia – Real People, Real Vision; Georgia - Women's Center; Hungary – PATENT; BOCS Foundation; 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 - Association for emancipation, solidarity and equality of women; Macedonia – H.E.R.A.; Macedonia – Shelter Center; Moldova – Family Planning Association; Moldova - Reproductive Health Training Center; Poland - Federation for Women and Family Planning; Ponton Group of Sex Educators; Romania - A.L.E.G.; Romania - AnA: Society for Feminist Analysis; Romania - Euroregional Center for Public Initiatives; Romania - The East European Institute of Reproductive Health; Russia - Novogorod Gender Center; Russia – Russian Association for Population and Development; Slovakia – Pro Choice; Tajikistan – Gender and Development; Ukraine - Women Health and Family Planning; Ukraine - Charitable SALUS Foundation; Uzbekistan - Future Generation

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