



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

Warsaw, 1st September 2009

Subject: UPCOMING VOTE ON THE DRAFT GENERAL BUDGET OF THE EUROPEAN UNION FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR 2010 (2009/2002 (BUD))

Dear Madame/Sir,

I am writing on behalf of the ASTRA Eastern and Central European Women's Network for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights to ask that you use your vote and influence within the Committee on Development of the European Parliament during the upcoming vote on the draft general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2010 (2009/2002 (BUD)).

ASTRA is a regional network of NGOs and individuals advocating in a collective voice for sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in Central and Eastern Europe. Our aim is to raise awareness about women's health and reproductive choices and to build capacity, knowledge and experience of our members and supporters and to improve policy standards in this respect. In our work we pay special attention to young people and other underserved groups. ASTRA is monitoring and reporting the status of implementation of gender-related policies on European Union level. Information about ASTRA Network, its members and its activities is available at our web site, www.astra.org.pl. The views expressed in this letter are submitted on behalf of our membership.

As the lead member of the European Parliament's Committee on Development, you have a key role in shaping the new law that will influence situation in developing countries. The way you vote on September the 3rd could determine the fate of millions of people.

Gay Mitchell (PPE) will present his draft opinion on the draft general budget for the financial year 2010 on the 3rd of September. We would like to express our

support for the draft opinion, which is responsive to many issues faced by developing countries.

However, the draft report contains also amendments that would seriously jeopardise support for developing countries, especially the issue of access to reproductive health. We are alarmed by the proposed amendments number 5529., 5530., and 5531.

The apparently harmless amendments tabled by MEP Anna Zaborska represent a serious attack to the objectives and organisations working in the field of human rights, population and development.

We support Ms. Zaborska's idea to protect human rights and incorporate the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) agenda into European Union's SRHR policy. However, we are concerned with the language used in the amendment as it can undermine SRHR funding in the EU budget.

As you know, ICPD recognised that comprehensive sexual and reproductive health, including voluntary family planning, is essential for individual and national development, as well as being one of the most cost-effective routes for alleviating poverty. By so doing ICPD was groundbreaking and brought about a seismic change in thinking about population and development, moving from demographics to sexual and reproductive health and wellbeing with a new emphasis on individual rights and gender equality. More recently, the ICPD goal of "universal access to reproductive health" has been incorporated into Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 5B and its contribution to all of the MDGs has been belatedly acknowledged. Adequate funding, effective policies and laws, and political commitment are all critical to success for population programme.

The amendment fails to take into account the extensive political support the EU has already to the ICPD Programme of Action since 1994. The EC's development policies and strategies affirm the continuing relevance of ICPD and they advance the goal of universal access to reproductive health by 2015 as being essential to achieving the Millennium Development Goals. This vision is also reflected in various EU development policy documents. For instance, the *European Consensus on Development*, adopted in 2005, states the EU's commitment to the ICPD Programme of Action in the context of poverty eradication and human development. The *EU-ACP Cotonou Agreement* also commits to "integrating population issues into development strategies in order to improve reproductive health, primary health care, family planning; and prevention of female genital mutilation; promoting the fight against HIV/AIDS". The *Joint Africa-EU Strategy*, adopted in December 2007, equally spells out the EU's commitment to support the ICPD agenda. The *European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid*, adopted in December 2007, and its Action Plan highlight the importance of the gender and health dimensions of humanitarian aid and address the need for interventions relating to HIV-AIDS, protection against sexual and gender based violence) and gender mainstreaming in Humanitarian Aid.

We recommend that the EP explores ways of addressing the abuse of human rights in the field of sexual and reproductive health in its annual report on the state of human rights. Such an authoritative report could take stock of governments which implement programme involving coerced abortions, forced sterilisations, infanticide as well as those which fail to uphold the minimum legal age of marriage or do not outlaw female genital mutilation. Similarly, the EP could request the EC to provide an annual report on spending for population assistance in compliance with UN agreed funding commitments arising from the ICPD Programme of Action.

We kindly ask you to consider voting against these amendments for the reasons explained above. It is our hope that you share our concern and that you can inform other colleagues of you of the danger that this amendment represent. We thank you in advance for your time and your consideration.

On behalf of ASTRA Network

Yours sincerely,



ASTRA Network Coordinator

President of Federation for Women and Family Planning

Wanda Nowicka
ASTRA Coordinator

ASTRA members:

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, Bulgarian Gender Research Foundation, Gender Education, Research and Technologies, Croatia - B.a.b.e. (Be Active, Be Emancipated), CESI - Center for Education and Counselling of Woman, Women's Centre for Sexuality and the Prevention, Research, and Combating of Sexual Violence - Women's Room, Georgia - Women's Center , 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 - 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,

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