



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

Warsaw, 31 August 2009

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

Dear Madame,

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 Women's Rights and Gender Equality 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 Women's Rights and Gender Equality, you have a key role in shaping the new law that will influence women's situation across the European Union and beyond. The way you vote on September the 1st could determine the fate of millions of women and girls.

Edit Bauer (EPP-ED) will present her draft opinion on the draft general budget for the financial year 2010 on the 1st of September. We would like to express our support for the draft opinion, which is responsive to many of our members' concerns about obstacles to access to resources, rights and power by women. We strongly endorse the draft's main amendments: (1) introduction of the principle of gender mainstreaming into economic and social recovery plans; (2) proposal to establish gender budgeting working group within Commission's Directorate-General for Budget; (3) call for more financial resources to be made available to combat all forms of discrimination against women; (4) call to combat social inequalities and the poverty which mainly affects women and children.

However, the draft report contains also amendments that would seriously jeopardise protection of women and girls, and their access to reproductive health. We are alarmed by the proposed amendments number 22. and 23.

22. Paragraph 7e (new), now states: "Calls on the European Union to strive determinedly to eliminate all forms of discrimination against girls (from conception onwards) and to allocate adequate resources to combat the inequalities deriving therefrom." We believe that restrictive access and laws discriminate against women as a group. Lack of access to SRHR should be confronted as a violation of public health, and a violation of human rights, which means women's rights to life, health, bodily integrity, equality and freedom from gender discrimination. The woman's rights to choose should be regarded as the core of equality in the European Union that is built upon respect for human rights. Therefore, we recommend that the draft formally endorse the principle of eliminating all forms of discrimination against women and girls.

23. Paragraph 7f (new) mandates that "Community assistance is not to be given to any authority organisation or programme which supports or participates in the management for the programme which involves human rights abuses". We support Ms. Zaborska's idea 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.

Therefore, we recommend that the amendment is changed so it mandates that funding to ICPD from Community assistance is increased. In our view, universal access to reproductive health and services should be a part of equality agenda of the EU, and it should be viewed as a public health issue.

The amendments 22. and 23. tabled by Anna Zaborska jeopardise European Union's principles in the area of sexual and reproductive rights and health.

We hope that you will support our aim to address the issue of access to reproductive rights and health of women - issues that strongly influence women's input in economic growth and their share of labour market. Progress in the area of gender equality will contribute to a society characterized by social cohesion, high employment and sustainable economic growth. Therefore, we would urge you to take a principled stand when voting commences by rejecting amendments number 22. and 23.

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,

Ukraine - Women Health and Family Planning, Charitable SALUS Foundation,
ASTRA ASSOCIATE MEMBERS: Center for Reproductive Rights, Albania,
Romania,
Women's Link Worldwide/Colombia.

**ASTRA Secretariat, ul. Nowolipie 13/15, 00-150 Warsaw, Poland,
ph/fax 48.22.635 9395, nwanda@federa.org.pl, www.astra.org.pl**