



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

Warsaw, 26 May 2009

Re. Ministerial Conference on New Ways to Overcome Gender Stereotypes, 27.05.09, Prague

President Mrs. Miroslava Kopicová  
Minister for Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic

ASTRA network welcomes your efforts to address the issue of prejudices and stereotypes as the main obstacle that deprives men and women of freedom of choice and freedom to decide about their lives. We welcome your proposed approach to deal with this problem by developing public awareness, education and information campaigns - prejudices cannot be overcome by a change in legal regulations but primarily by change of mentality.

ASTRA Network also supports the Declaration of the 119th Session of the Committee of Ministers, Madrid, 12 May 2009) for "Making gender equality a reality." We fully agree with the Ministers that one of the steps to achieve full gender equality is to 'eliminate gender stereotypes that are responsible for the under utilisation of human resources and which are an obstacle to self-realisation of women and men.'

Although reducing gender equality as a means to overcome gender stereotypes is included in the discourse of mainstream development, in most EU Member States inequalities between women and men in the workplace, in political institutions and in the home have proven persistent. For all the efforts that have been made so far, gender mainstreaming has largely failed to live up to its promises. The dilution and depoliticisation of the 'gender agenda' as it has come to be taken up by European institutions calls for more attention to be paid to what it takes to make a difference to women's lives. We hope that initiatives like the present conference will reverse this unfortunate trend.

Gender equality cannot be achieved without guaranteeing women's sexual and reproductive health information and health services are essential for achieving the Beijing Platform for Action, the Cairo Program of Action, and the Millennium Development Goals (Declaration of the European Union Conference of Ministers of Gender Equality, Luxembourg, 4 February 2005).

Without access to the means to regulate their fertility, there is little chance of women having the time and energy to participate in community affairs or politics until their children are grown up - unless they are of sufficiently elite status to be able to employ others to take care of their children and households for them. To narrow the social gap between women and men and ensure gender equity in health care, ASTRA Network promotes the development of policies and programmes that guarantee universal access to sexual and reproductive health services and the free exercise of sexual and reproductive rights. We encourage you to support

women's rights organisations that promote such instruments and to develop and implement relevant EU-wide programmes.

Education and awareness rising have been behind the successes of overcoming other stereotypes such as religious, racial and cultural. ASTRA believes that it is a high time that EU uses this proven tool and introduces an obligatory sexual education to prevail over gender stereotypes.

In this context, ASTRA network calls on you that among "any special measures to address and overcome stereotypes in education" you include an EU-wide public sexuality education that ASTRA and other women's organisations have been advocating for as one of the means for overcoming gender stereotypes.

On behalf of ASTRA Network

Yours sincerely,



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", Novgorod 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.

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