



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

Warsaw, 10 August 2009

Dear Sir/Madame,

On behalf of ASTRA regional network of NGOs I would like to congratulate you being elected a Member of the European Parliament. We wish you success in your work and hope that your term as a MEP will be also beneficial to the EU's broader human rights agenda.

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.

We are looking forward to work with you on a number of topics related to SRHR and gender equality. Among others, we hope that during your cadency you will take up the work related to the EU "anti-discrimination directive". ASTRA Network believes that this directive will extend protection against discrimination on the grounds of age, disability and sexual orientation including relevant education and services such as healthcare and housing - not currently covered by existing EU anti-discrimination laws. Presently in the middle of its legislative journey, the directive must win the unanimous support of the member states - we are hoping that you will contribute to this process.

For a number of years ASTRA works and supports relevant activities of the European Parliament. We provide support and advice to the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality. Our representatives take part in the Committee's meetings relevant to our mission and have co-organized Public Hearing on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (28 January 2008) when ASTRA representative, Wanda Nowicka presented recent trends regarding sexual and reproductive rights in Central and Eastern Europe and identified a number of negative developments which soon might lead to diminishing access to sexual and reproductive rights.

Astra Focal Point in Brussels monitors activities of the European institutions in terms of progress regarding the status of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, disseminates this information and calls for action throughout entire ASTRA network in Central and Eastern Europe.

With this letter ASTRA would also like to make you aware that in a number of European Union countries, including the new Member States from Central and Eastern Europe, reproductive health remains to be inadequately addressed by state policies and programs. Limited access to contraceptive services as well as sexuality information, education and counseling often leads to undesired pregnancies and high numbers of abortions which are easily preventable if properly addressed in timely manner. Still many women are denied access to modern contraceptive methods because of financial inaccessibility. Unwanted pregnancies constitute a major public health concern everywhere but especially in these European countries where abortion is criminalized. Restricted access to safe and legal abortion is leaving many women in vulnerable situations which threaten their life and health. The most recent alarming example is tightening of abortion regulations in Slovakia.

We wish that you work with us towards strengthening gender equality and protection against discrimination. 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.

I hope that you take all our concerns into consideration during your term.

We are looking forward to work with you.

May I again express my very best congratulations and wishes of success in your work on behalf of my organisation.

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", 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.

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