

Mr. Vladimir Spidla
European Commissioner for Employment,
Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities

1 February 2006

Dear Mr. Commissioner,

I am writing to you following your meeting with the Polish Non-Governmental Organizations in Warsaw on 30th January in which I had a pleasure to participate.

To refresh your memory, during the meeting I was speaking on behalf of the Polish Federation for Women and Family Planning and ASTRA – CEE Women's Network for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) about the need of addressing SRHR in the context of gender equality policies.

Let me first thank you for meeting with us. I find this meeting very informative, fruitful and promising for our future collaboration with the European Commission.

Particularly, I would like to congratulate you on your new initiative you announced to be launched on the 8th March regarding gender equality. It sounds like a great tool on the road to achieving gender equality in Europe.

From this very sketchy information about this initiative we learnt that among other things it will address sexuality-related issues such as FGM and non-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. Enjoyment of human rights in this respect is one of necessary preconditions of bodily integrity which need protection. This is really great news.

Let me further suggest that this initiative should also address other SRHR issues such as access to sexuality education and family planning as well as the access to safe and legal abortion. Today, in Europe, women's sexual and reproductive rights and health are under serious attack. In several of the EU Member States women's sexual and reproductive rights and health are repressed and/or denied. If women are not able to exercise SRHR they will never be equal in any society.

Therefore, we fully support the declaration of the Conference of Ministers of Gender Equality, Luxembourg, 4 February 2005:

"[G]ender equality cannot be achieved without guaranteeing women's sexual and reproductive health and rights...that expanding access to 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."

We hope that the spirit of this important declaration will be reflected in your 8th March initiative.

Finally, let me once more invite you the Hearing on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in Europe organized by ASTRA to be held in the European Parliament on the 9th February.

Sincerely,

On behalf of ASTRA Network,

Wanda Nowicka
President of the Polish Federation for Women and Family Planning/ASTRA Secretariat