



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

Warsaw, 03 January 2010

His Excellency
José Luis Rodríguez
Prime Minister of Spain

Dear Sir,

In the wake of the beginning of Spanish Presidency of the EU Council of Ministers, on behalf of ASTRA Network I want to extend to you my most sincere congratulations and wish you every success at a time when you are taking over as leader of EU. We hope that your term as President will be as beneficial to all EU Member States and the rest of the world as it was during the previous Spanish Presidency, when the term was marked by placing special importance on all matters concerning the protection and promotion of the health of the population. ASTRA Network applauds the work you did to secure access to reproductive and sexual rights and health in Spain, hoping that your commitment will influence the direction taken in this respect by the trio presidency starting under your leadership.

Linking organizations from 17 different countries, ASTRA is the only network focused on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in Central and Eastern Europe. ASTRA aims at advancing SRHR as fundamental human rights and strengthening their observance and implementation on the national, regional and international level. In a region characterized by economic and political transition, widening social inequalities, a lack of political will to invest in sexual and reproductive health, increasing threats to reproductive and sexual rights and a growing anti-choice movement, ASTRA advocates for policies and programs that recognize women's and young people's health needs and human rights. The network plays a critical role in mobilizing for change, strengthening women's movement visibility and voice and linking the

Central and Eastern European women's movement to wider global processes on women's health and rights.

Your Excellency,

You must be 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.

Taking into account your commitment to secure access to safe and legal abortion services, contraception, and comprehensive sexuality education in Spain, I would like to encourage you to take necessary steps towards the development of legislative framework protecting access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) supplies and services in the European Union. The recent changes adopted to Spanish legislation regarding access to reproductive and sexual health constitute a milestone in the fight for gender equality. Our organizations therefore urge you, Mr. President of the Spanish Government, to take a strong position to further promote Spain's leading role in securing access to SRHR services and supplies during your leadership in the European Union.

We highly appreciate your commitment to renew the Lisbon Agenda, that will have a critical role in overcoming the financial crisis. We support your idea of the formulation of the plan for equal opportunities for men and women for the period 2011- 2015. But it is not enough only to make progress in the area of the economy. It must also be an economic development which is also sustainable socially. Because there can not be long-term, sustainable economic development without a cohesive society; and because a strong and up-to-date welfare state which assures the wellbeing and security of its citizens is also an engine for economic growth. We welcome your postulate of strengthened gender equality and improved protection against discrimination hoping that you will also address the issue of access to reproductive rights and health of women that strongly influences 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 expect that you also concentrate on the financial impact of demographic changes and on the need for innovation, aiming to maintain a high quality of health services provision and to ensure access to these services.

I hope that you take all our concerns into consideration during your Presidency term. We would be happy to provide any further information or material that would assist your consideration of these matters.

We are looking forward to work with you during the next six months and beyond. May I again express my very best congratulations and wishes of success in your work on behalf of my organization.

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, IPAS.