



Warsaw, 8th of February, 2017

Dear Ms. Vilija Blinkevičiūtė,

On behalf of ASTRA Network, Central and Eastern European Network for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights we would like to congratulate you on your new role as Chair of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality of the European Parliament. We wish you success in your work and hope that your term as Chair of the FEMM Committee will be also beneficial to the EU's broader women's rights and sexual and reproductive health and rights agenda. We also welcome you as a representative of the region of Central and Eastern Europe.

ASTRA is a regional network of NGOs from Central and Eastern Europe currently comprising 39 member organisations from 21 countries advocating in a collective voice for sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). 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, as well as to improve policy standards in this respect. In our work we pay special attention to young people and other underserved groups. ASTRA is also monitoring and reporting the status of implementation of gender-related policies on European Union level, as well as advocating for the full realisation of sexual and reproductive health and rights at UN level. We also raise awareness about the inequalities within the region and the existing discrepancies in access to sexual and reproductive health education, services and supplies between Eastern and Western European countries.

For the past few years, ASTRA has been one of the few voices warning about conservative and anti-women efforts in our region. Women's reproductive and sexual rights are no longer in crisis; they are now questioned and openly under attack almost everywhere in the region. The status of women's rights in our region has been depreciating over the past few years, reaching its peak in 2016, when conservative and anti-women forces gained power and influence in several countries of this region.

We are concerned that the Central and Eastern European countries will negatively influence international progress on sexual and reproductive health and rights and, hence, count on your bold leadership and support.

We wish that you collaborate with us towards strengthening gender equality and working towards realisation of sexual and reproductive health and rights for all. 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 into economic growth and their share of labour market. Progress in the area of gender equality and full realisation of sexual and reproductive health and rights will contribute to a society characterized by social cohesion, high employment and sustainable economic growth.

We hope that you will take all our concerns into consideration during your tenure and we are looking forward to working with you. May we, again, express our heartfelt congratulations and wishes of success in your current role.

On behalf of ASTRA Network,

Marta Szostak

Network Coordinator



Krystyna Kacpura

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