



EUROPEAN WOMEN'S
LOBBY
EUROPEEN DES FEMMES

Brussels, 10 October 2017

To : Honorable Valerijus Simulik, Chair of the Human Rights Committee of the Seimas,

Cc: Honorable Dalia Grybauskaite, President of Lithuania
Honorable Saulius Skvernelis, Prime Minister of Lithuania
Honorable Viktoras Pranckietis, Speaker of the Seimas

Re.: EWL deep concern about the discussions to restrict access to abortion and maternal health in Lithuania

Your excellency,

I am writing on behalf of the European Women's Lobby (EWL), the largest umbrella organisation for women's human rights in Europe. Let me express our deep concern about the legislative debates currently taking place in Lithuania to restrict access to safe and legal abortion.

Our member organization in Lithuania, the Lithuanian Women's Lobby, representing a wide range of Lithuanian women's organisations, has brought to our attention the discussions on the draft law registered in 2013 whose worrying provisions can have a detrimental impact on women's rights and sexual and reproductive health and rights in the country and seriously undermine the capacity of Lithuanian women to decide freely on their own maternity.

The EWL is deeply concerned as laws that define life as beginning at fertilization and recognize the rights of the "unborn child" create an inherent conflict between the rights of the woman and the fetus. This is especially problematic when pregnant women face medical emergencies; because the treatment necessary to preserve the woman's life or health can conflict with fetal health, health care providers may deny women life-saving medical care in order to protect the fetus.

The EWL believes that it is essential that the Lithuanian legislation takes stocks of all its International Commitments to ensure women's full enjoyment of their human rights including their sexual and reproductive rights. Please, allow us to recall some of the international human rights agreements to which Poland is a party calling for the realization of equality between women and men and the full respect of each individual's sexual and reproductive rights, including the UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform for Action. Furthermore, on the 23rd anniversary of the Cairo International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) and the adoption of its Programme for action, it is essential for all the parties to recognize and ensure the basic rights of all couples and individuals to decide freely and responsible on the number, spacing and timing of their children, and to have the information and means to do so, including access to healthcare, legal and safe abortion, and reliable, safe and affordable contraception.

According to the UN¹, restrictions regarding of abortion “infringe human dignity by restricting the freedoms to which individuals are entitled under the right to health, particularly in respect of decision-making and bodily integrity”. Furthermore, as the World Health Organisation (WHO) has repeatedly indicated restrictive abortion laws result in increased rates of maternal mortality and morbidity, because women are forced to utilize unsafe, clandestine procedures in order to terminate pregnancies. It is unacceptable that in the 21st century, a European country has a legislation which directly endangers women’s lives.

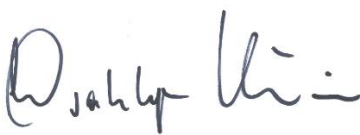
The overwhelming majority of European Union and Council of Europe member states allow a woman to have an abortion on request without restriction as to reason, or on broad therapeutic and socio-economic grounds, during the first stages of pregnancy. In addition, recent constitutional jurisprudence in Europe has confirmed the validity of liberal abortion laws while establishing that protection of prenatal life must be consistent with women’s rights, including the rights to privacy and self-determination.

Europe should be leading the way on ensuring women’s full enjoyment of their human rights. In the Council Conclusions on EU priorities at UN Human Rights Fora adopted in 2016, the EU stated its commitment to the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Programme of Action of the ICPD and remains committed to sexual and reproductive health and rights².

Furthermore, the European Parliament has also adopted, on 12 September 2017, a resolution where it *“strongly affirms that the denial of sexual and reproductive health and rights services, including safe and legal abortion, is a form of violence against women and girls; reiterates that women and girls must have control over their bodies and sexualities; calls on all the Member States to guarantee comprehensive sexuality education, ready access for women to family planning, and the full range of reproductive and sexual health services, including modern contraceptive methods and safe and legal abortion”*³.

The EWL counts on the Members of the Lithuanian Parliament to take urgent action to defeat this draft law, as it would have devastating consequences on women’s lives and health, in addition to depriving women of their fundamental human rights.

Yours sincerely,



Edith Schratzberger-Vecsei
President of the European Women’s Lobby

¹ [Interim report of the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health](#). 66 session. Document number A/66/254

² <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/02/15-fac-un-human-rights-fora/>

³ <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&reference=P8-TA-2017-0329&language=EN&ring=A8-2017-0266>