Members of the Austrian Parliament

Hon. Marek Kuchciński
Marshal of the Sejm (Speaker)
Polish Sejm

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Regarding: Initiative for a draft law introducing a complete ban on abortion

Dear Honourable Kuchciński, MP

We, the undersigned Members of Parliament of Austria are strongly concerned about the following recent worrying developments with regard to access to abortion in Poland:

1) A draft law introducing a complete ban on abortion and a new category into the criminal code of "prenatal murder", which will introduce a penalty of three to five years in prison for women, doctors and anyone helping a woman to perform an abortion. If abortion is unintentional the penalty will be up to three years. Additionally, there is a proposal to replace the term "human fetus" with "conceived child" where possible. This initiative stems from the "Stop abortion" civic committee and is currently waiting for your decision as the Marshall of the Sejm on whether it will be registered.
2) Plans of your party, Law and Justice to end state funding for in-vitro fertilization (IVF).
3) Plans to reinstate a prescription requirement for "morning after" emergency contraceptive pills.

Poland already has one of the strictest laws on access to abortion which allows women to terminate pregnancy only in three extreme cases: when her life and/or health are threatened, when the pregnancy is the result of a criminal act, or when the foetus is severely damaged. This seriously affects many women and families on a daily basis, particularly those poor and uneducated ones and pushes them to use back-street abortions or to travel abroad. For example, unlike the figures reported by the National Health Fund's data (1,812 abortions in the country in 2014), non-state sources estimate the number of terminated pregnancies at around 80,000 per year, and perhaps as much as 200,000 including illegal procedures and "abortion tourism" to EU countries with more lenient laws (Source: The Federation for Women and Family Planning).

Academic studies, UN Reports, the World Health Organisation as well as country examples have on numerous occasions proved that legal barriers to abortion services do not decrease the rate of abortion, but increase the risk of maternal mortality. The example from Poland's neighbour Romania clearly confirms this. As a result of Ceauşescu's attempt to ban abortion, more than 9,000 women died between 1965 and 1989 due to complications arising from illegal and unsafe abortions. It is proven that the rate of abortions can only be reduced by improving the access to contraceptives, providing comprehensive information on family planning, and introducing better policies reconciling family and work.

We urge you, Honourable Kuchciński, Marshal of the Sejm:

1) To reject the initiative introducing a complete ban from being registered to collect signatures,
2) To abandon the plans to end state funding for in-vitro fertilization (IVF),
3) To abandon plans for a prescription requirement for "morning after" emergency contraceptive pills.

All individuals are entitled to the highest attainable standard of health, which the state must ensure.

We trust that you and our colleagues in Poland will continue guaranteeing this standard to its population.

Petra Bayr

KATHARINA RUCHAROWITS

TANJA WINDBÜCHLER-SOUSCHILL

BERÎVAN ASLAN