Advocacy efforts to keep abortion safe and legal: Romanian, Moldovan Russian, Macedonian cases

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Central Eastern Europe and Central Asia

• Liberal abortion laws (except Poland)
• Abortions are performed in medical settings by qualified professionals with approved techniques
• Nationwide programs have been implemented to improve access and increase the use of modern contraceptives.
Regional successes according to the 2007 World Health Organization (WHO) and 2009 Alan Guttmacher Institute reports

- Eastern Europe is the region of the world with the greatest reduction in the abortion rate
- The number of unsafe abortions and resulting maternal mortality decreased substantially in Central Eastern Europe and Central Asia
- More women than ever are using contraceptives to prevent unwanted pregnancies
In the same time...

- More and more providers are invoking “conscious objections” refusing to perform abortions
- Increasing negative attitude toward abortion in the society
- Abortion – a “tabu” topic, which leads to misconceptions, poor knowledge, etc
- Increasing stigmatization of women
- Liberal abortion legislation increasingly criticized: attempts to restrict it in both: first and second trimester
Similarities of the used anti-choice strategies

- “Increased” interest to abortion topic from the orthodox church, increasing influence of the church on the governments
- “Increased” interest toward the topic among politicians, MPs, etc
- Increased movements before the election – inclusion of the initiatives to ban abortion in the platforms of the parties, pretending they “care for women” and society
- Speculative link with the demographic crisis
- Speculations with the “risks” of abortion (cervical and breast cancer, and “post-abortion syndrome”)
- Silent and soft attacks: legislative initiatives introduced during the summer months (vacation time for the majority), urgently, with no public debates
- Speculation with the “right of unborn child” versus women’s right
- Speculations with moral, family values, “women’s mission”...
- Use of the low level of knowledge of the people’s sexual-reproductive rights and their manipulation
EFFECTS OF ANTI-ABORTION LAW AND LEGALIZATION OF ABORTION IN ROMANIA

Maternal and abortion deaths per 100,000 live births, by year, Romania

- Maternal deaths
- Abortion deaths

Abortion restricted

Abortion liberalised

Reproductive Health Training Center (RHTC)
Centrul de Instruire in Domeniul Sănătății Reproductive din Republica Moldova

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Anti-choice presence in Parliament
Who are our opponents?

• Romanian Parliament – 52 MPs (out of 469) signed a draft bill for the establishment, operation and organization of crisis pregnancy counseling offices
• The draft law was initiated and is endorsed by 9 organizations affiliated to the religious right
Undertaken advocacy strategy:

to ensure that the law initiative is blocked successfully in various stages of the parliamentary process
Tactics

Form a coalition of specialized NGOs & human rights groups to voice opposition

• Persuade initiators to withdraw the proposal and start negotiations with the parliamentary opposition

• Inform MPs about reasons the draft law is in conflict with women’s rights to life, privacy, physical integrity and autonomy, confidentiality, health and non-discrimination

• Raise public support through media
• MOH OB-Gyn Commission recommended a negative resolution and sent its formal recommendation to Parliament
• WHO conveyed to MOH a technical letter supporting a negative resolution
• MOH sent its formal recommendation to Parliament
• MPs who initially signed the draft already decided to withdraw their support
• Legal Council incorporated all legal, medical and human rights arguments in their position, requesting significant changes of the draft law
• Senate Health Commission unanimously voted and issued a negative resolution against the draft bill
Moldova: anti-abortion initiative, August 2011 proposed by MPs

Same proposals + additional:

- Spousal consent for married women
- The right of the provider and medical institutions to refuse women, asking for pregnancy termination
- To legally allow the pharmacies to refuse to offer the pills for MA and contraceptives

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The initiative was withdrawn in October!

Tactics used

- Sensitized local RH NGOs, MoH, UN agencies, media, etc
- MoH issued a negative resolution, using the public health arguments (maternal mortality and morbidity)
- A negative resolution from human rights counselors of UN country agencies, using human, sexual reproductive rights
- A large social-media Campaign, addressing challenging questions to the authors-MPs
- This unified responses was possible only due to the long-lasting efforts and CAC project supported by WHO in Moldova, which allowed to create this “alliance” of pro-choice stakeholders
Russia: They started with the II-nd trim abortion

• Reduced to only 4 the social indications (before 2003 they were 14)
• On Feb 6\textsuperscript{th}, 2012, the Russian Government issued a decree on the Social Ground for Artificial Termination of Pregnancy.
• This decree establishes that the only social ground for abortion is rape.
• Medical indications were also limited to a few during the following years.
Russia: Anti-choice 2011 proposals for the Federal Legislation regulating abortion (first trimester)

- Abortion on request (available term shrinking from 12 to 8 weeks)
- Waiting periods (up to 7 days). Recently a fine was introduced for providers who brakes “the period of silence”.
- Limiting access to prenatal examinations
- Conscious objection for health professional
- Biased counseling from physicians conducting abortions
- Ultrasound viewing of hearing the fetus
- Spousal consent requirement and increasing the age limit
- Excluding, or severely restricting, abortion from State health insurance coverage
- Emergency contraception be obtained only by prescription
- Reforming the licensing process for abortion health care services
The recent anti-choice initiative

• July 2011: President Medvedev signed the Law containing restrictions for advertising of abortions in the media

• they have gathered 100 000 signatures in order to forbid abortions in Russia and have passed them to Governmental Dume. Silence from Duma since May 2014...

• Another initiative is the proposal to take abortion out of the Mandatory Health Insurance
RAPD: “we took very seriously - it is risky!”

- The pro-choice "Rowan Bunch" RAPD` Coalition collected and sent informational materials to all related institutions:
  - International Human Rights Instruments,
  - the rights based approaches in the Health Care sector,
  - lessons from other countries and economic calculations regarding the costs of legal abortions versus the possible cost of the complications due to clandestine and criminal abortions
- The RAPD experts have conducted meetings with the Members from the Health Care Governmental Duma Committee
Results:

• They gained support from the Ministry of Health in this particular case of defending women's Reproductive Rights.

• Rejection of the anti-choice initiative by the Government Duma.

They say: “We are as a watch-dog here, detecting any of the negative developments and/or restrictions in SRHR field, to be able to react promptly”.
Important! Working with providers and patients: real results on local level

• Pharma company (distributor of MA pills and MVA) is permanently organizing training for providers and on-line informational campaign for the providers and the patients.
• There are regions where MA has gotten is 60%
• In several regions Abortions are covered by the local government (in 10 regions from 89)
• According to the official data there is no abortion related maternal mortality during last three years, due to the inclusion of evidence-based technologies
• Medical induction has started to be used for II-nd trim abortion, but only in the regions, and using their local protocol.
• In some regions they extended the use of MA up to 63 days of LMP
Macedonia

• In June 2013 the Parliament has adopted a new Abortion Bill to replace the previous one, which existed for 40 years.
• The new law introduces written request for abortion, mandatory pre abortion counselling, 3-day waiting period as well as austere fines for the medical personnel.
• The Parliament decided to discuss the adoption of the Draft Law in urgent procedure without taking efforts to involve all interested parties in a transparent and comprehensive consultative process.
Macedonia: the undertaken activities:

• CSOs demonstrated unanimity to block the adoption of the new law.
• Wrote a legal analysis of the harmful law provisions to the women right to choice, organised media and social media advocacy campaign
• organized protests in front of the parliament and liaise with pro-choice MPs
• involved international community and collected signatories of NGOS across world to the Parliament and President, organized support letters coming from the members of the Council of Europe
• On 28 September — HERA and other NGOs has challenged the Law at the Constitutional Court
Macedonia: result:

• No decision form the Constitutional Court is reached so far
International Campaign for Women’s Right to Safe Abortion

Coordinated by International Consortium for Medical Abortion (ICMA)

International Day of Action for Decriminalization of Abortion:
28 September
Maternal and abortion deaths per 100,000 live births, by year, Romania

- Maternal deaths
- Abortion deaths

in Republica Moldova