

# 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

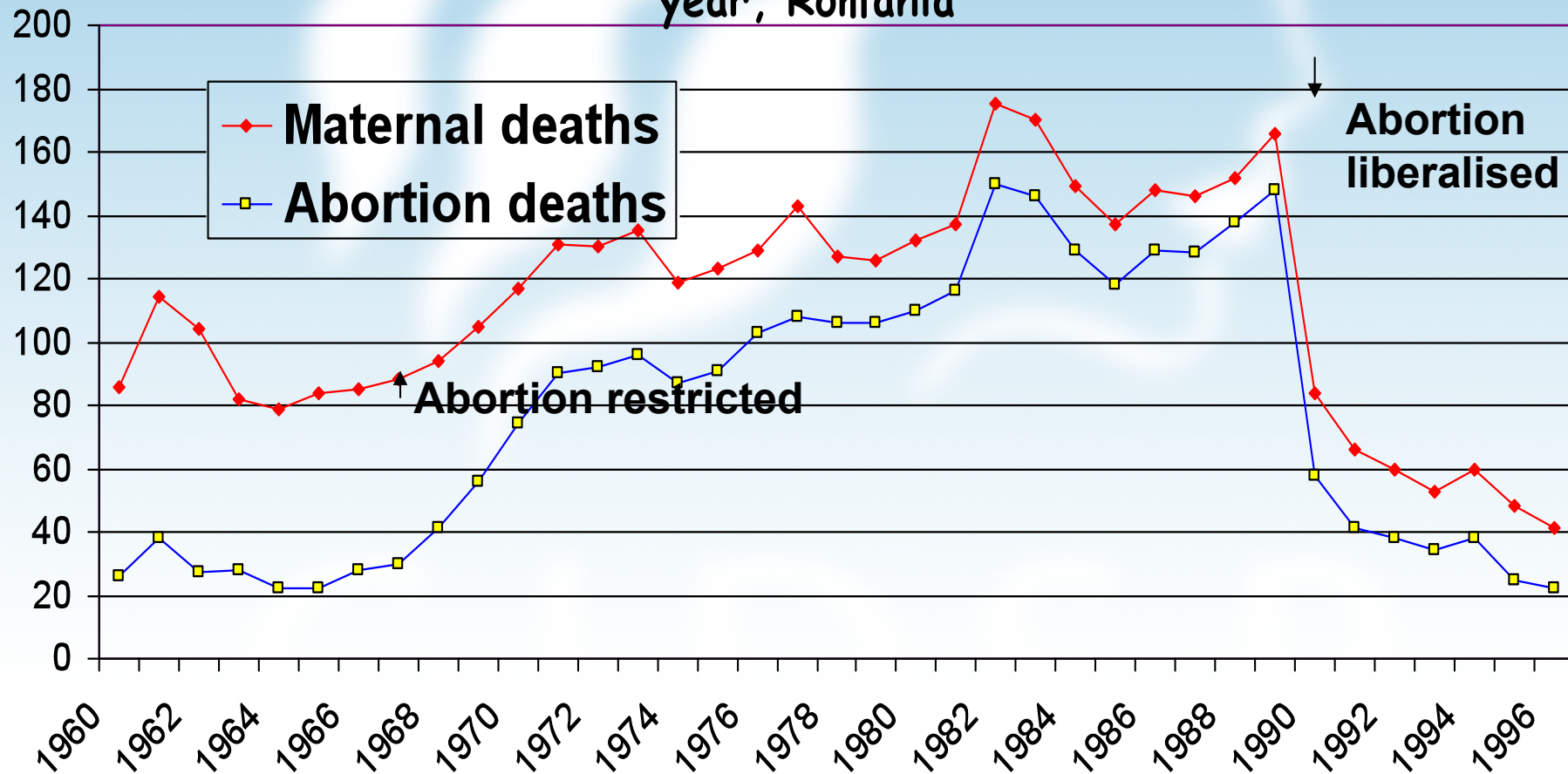
# Similarities of the used anti-choice strategies

- “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



# 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**

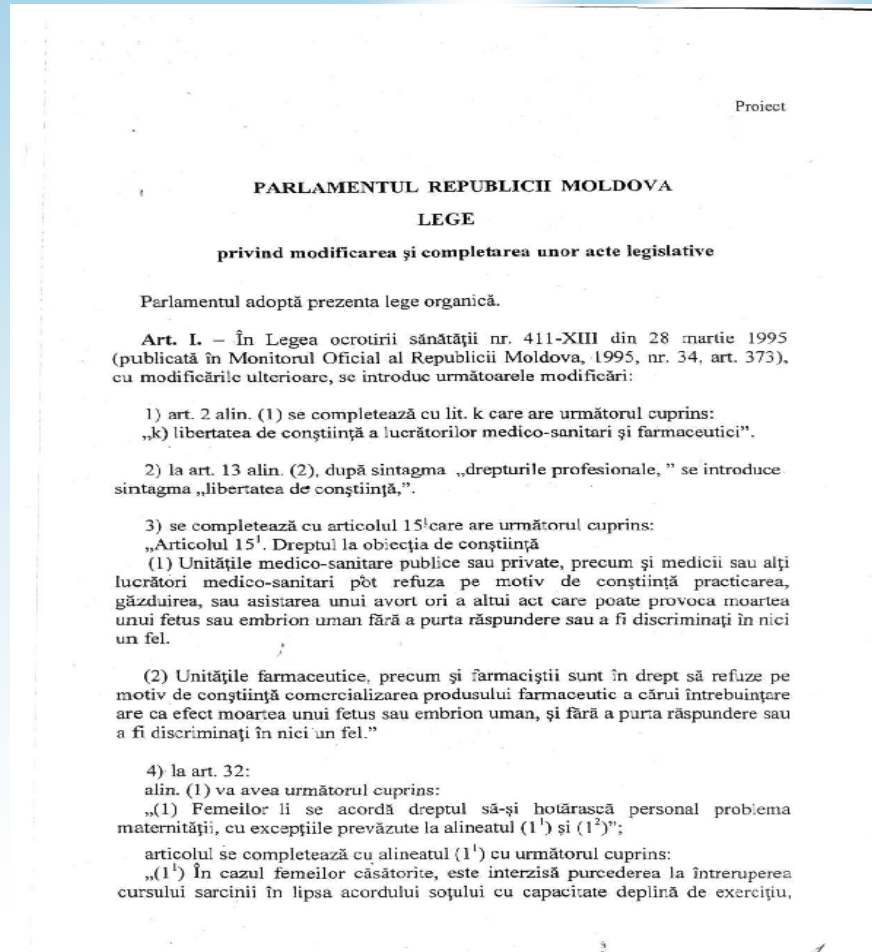


# Results



- 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

# 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<sup>th</sup>, 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 from the Constitutional Court is reached so far

**International Campaign for Women's Right to Safe Abortion**

# 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**



Training Center (RHTC)  
Centrul Sănătății Reproductive din F





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

