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Access to safe and legal abortion in Europe

Draft report
Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men
Rapporteur: Mrs Gisela WURM, Austria, Socialist Group

A. Preliminary draft resolution

1. The Parliamentary Assembly reaffirms that abortion can in no circumstances be regarded as a family planning method. Abortion must, as far as possible, be avoided. All possible means compatible with women's rights must be used to reduce the number of both unwanted pregnancies and abortions.
2. Although abortion is legal in the vast majority of the Council of Europe member states, the Assembly is concerned that, in many of these states, numerous conditions are imposed and restrict the effective access to safe abortion. These restrictions have discriminatory effects, since women who are well-informed and possess adequate financial means can often obtain legal and safe abortions more easily.
3. The Assembly also notes that, in member states where abortion is legal, conditions are not always such as to guarantee women effective access to this right: the lack of local health care facilities, the lack of doctors willing to carry out abortions, the repeated medical consultations required, the time allowed for changing one's mind and the waiting time for the abortion all have the potential to make access to abortion more difficult, or even impossible in practice.
4. The Assembly takes the view that abortion should not be banned. A ban on abortions does not result in fewer such abortions, but mainly leads to clandestine abortions, which are more traumatic and more dangerous. The lawfulness of abortion does not have an effect on a woman's need for an abortion, but only on her access to a safe abortion.
5. At the same time, the Assembly is convinced that appropriate sexual and reproductive health strategies, including compulsory sex education for young people, contribute to less recourse to abortion.
6. The Assembly affirms the right of all human beings, women included, to respect for their physical integrity and to freedom to control their own bodies. In this context, the ultimate decision on whether or not to have an abortion should be a matter for the woman concerned, and she should have the means of exercising this right in an effective way.
7. The Parliamentary Assembly invites the member states of the Council of Europe to:
 - 7.1. decriminalise abortion, if they have not already done so;
 - 7.2. guarantee women's effective exercise of their right to abortion;

7.3. allow women freedom of choice and offer the conditions of a free and enlightened choice;

7.4. lift restrictions which hinder, *de jure* or *de facto*, access to safe abortion, and in particular take the necessary steps to create the appropriate conditions for health, medical and psychological care and offer suitable financial cover;

7.5. adopt appropriate sexual and reproductive health strategies based on sound and reliable data, ensuring continued improvements and expansion of contraceptive service provision by increased investments from the national budgets into improving health systems, reproductive health supplies and information provision;

7.6. ensure that women have access to contraception at a reasonable cost, of a suitable nature for them, and chosen by them;

7.7. introduce compulsory sex education for young people (inter alia, in schools), so as to avoid as many unwanted pregnancies (and therefore abortions) as possible.