



Brussels, 14 September 2020

Dear Mr Boris Kollár, Speaker of the National Council of the Slovak Republic
Dear Members of the National Council,

Dear Colleagues,

As Members of the European Parliament we are writing to express our deep concern regarding the *Draft Law which Amends and Supplements Act No. 576/2004 Coll. of Laws on Healthcare, Healthcare-related Services, and on Amending and Supplementing Certain Acts as Amended, and which Amends and Supplements Certain Acts* (Print no. 154, 19 June 2020) that is currently pending in the Slovak Parliament. If adopted, we believe this legislation will jeopardise women's access to safe and legal abortion care and evidence-based information on abortion and undermine women's sexual and reproductive health and rights.

We are deeply concerned that the draft bill seeks to increase the mandatory waiting period currently required before abortion on request from 48 to 96 hours and to extend its application to all situations except when a woman's health or life is at immediate risk. We are also concerned about the proposed new medical authorization procedure in cases when abortion is needed for medical reasons, which would require two medical certifications as opposed to the single doctor certification currently required.

The imposition of mandatory waiting periods before accessing abortion care undermines women's autonomy in reproductive decision-making, disregards their individual needs and perspectives, increases financial and personal costs related to accessing the services and can cause women emotional harm. Moreover, mandatory waiting periods can lead to delays in the provision of care, which can jeopardise women's ability to access safe, legal abortion services.¹

Imposing onerous authorization requirements, including certifications by multiple medical professionals, will cause delays in access to services, which could result in denial of services due to the time limits on the legal grounds, create complex and burdensome administrative procedures, increase the costs of accessing abortion care, and limit the availability of services and their equitable geographic distribution.²

The draft law's proposed prohibition of "advertising" is also of serious concern and could lead to restrictions on access to evidence-based information on abortion care and create chilling

¹ See World Health Organization, *Safe Abortion: Technical and Policy Guidance for Health Systems* (2012), p. 96-97.

² *Id.* p. 94.

effects on medical providers. We are also deeply concerned with the proposed collection and sharing of personal information from women seeking abortion care, including the requirement to state the reasons for their decision to have an abortion, which could deter women from seeking legal abortion care.

The United Nations human rights mechanisms have repeatedly urged Slovakia to remove barriers in access to safe and legal abortion, including the mandatory waiting period, mandatory counselling and third-party authorization requirements. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has explicitly called on Slovakia to avoid any retrogression in relation to women's sexual and reproductive health rights.

Measures that roll back protections for women's human rights are of grave concern as they undermine a core European Union value, that of advancing gender equality. Unhindered and timely access to reproductive health services and respect for women's reproductive autonomy and decision-making is critical to protecting women's human rights and gender equality.

We are deeply concerned that this draft bill is one of several legislative proposals seeking to restrict reproductive freedom that has come before the Slovak Parliament in the past few months. **We respectfully urge members of the Slovak Parliament to reject this draft bill and to refrain from any further attempts to restrict women's sexual and reproductive health and rights in Slovakia.**

Yours sincerely,

Malin BJÖRK, GUE/NGL Member of the European Parliament

Maria NOICHL, S&D Member of the European Parliament

Terry REINTKE, Greens/EFA Member of the European Parliament

Ernest URTASUN, Greens/EFA Member of the European Parliament

Chrysoula ZACHAROPOULOU, Renew Europe Member of the European Parliament

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On behalf of the All of Us Network in the European Parliament

CC:

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Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic

Mr Ivan Korčok

Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic