

Religious lobbying threatens European Parliament vote on gender equality

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On Tuesday 10 March the European Parliament will vote on a report about gender equality in the EU. NGOs are concerned that religious groups may defeat the report, and are appealing for support.

The report, written by Marc Tarabella MEP, is wide-ranging and covers issues such as violence against women, childcare facilities, negative stereotypes about women, the gender-pay gap and paid paternity leave.

Supporters have warned of an "ultra-conservative agenda" which has opposed the advancement of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in the past, under the "false pretense that SRHR falls under the exclusive competence of EU Member States."

Groups including the European Humanist Federation, Catholics for Choice, the European Women Lobby, the International Planned Parenthood Federation, the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association, and the European Parliamentary Forum on Population and Development are supporting the Tarabella report.

In 2013, a report on women's reproductive rights was narrowly defeated, in part due to [lobbying by the religious-right](#). Warning of the previous defeat, NGOs are calling on supporters to back the Tarabella report and have written to MEPs to raise awareness about what they are calling "misleading" arguments against the report.

In a letter signed by all six groups, supporters write: "Several regressive anti-human rights organizations – like CitizenGo or European Dignity Watch - have called MEPs to oppose the report under the false pretense that SRHR falls under the exclusive competence of EU Member States. Those are the same that have manipulated the concept of SRHR to impose their ultra-conservative agenda in the past and threatened Edite Estrela for her Report on SRHR in 2013 and Ulrike Lunacek for her Report on EU roadmap against homophobia in 2014.

"There is indeed a broad consensus throughout Europe to ensure men and women can access contraception, safe abortion services and reproductive healthcare and information on sexuality. This is the basis upon which people can make free and fair choices about their family life and composition."

NSS campaigns manager Stephen Evans said: "I encourage secularists to contact their MEP and voice their support. Well-financed religious groups are campaigning against the report, as they have with previous votes on women's rights and gender equality, and it needs as much backing as it can get. It is clearly wrong for religious interest groups to be endangering the rights of women."

The full report can be read [here](#)

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