

European lawmakers urge broader abortion rights: A gauge of European trends

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Lawmakers from the 47 countries in the Council of Europe have said women should be guaranteed the right to “safe and legal abortion”—a resolution that faced heavy criticism from Roman Catholic groups.

The council’s parliamentary assembly, in an April 16 resolution, said that abortion should be avoided as far as possible and “in no circumstances be regarded as a family planning method.” However, a total ban would not result in fewer abortions, but instead would lead to clandestine abortions and abortion “tourism,” the resolution stated.

The Council of Europe, whose headquarters are in Strasbourg, eastern France, is an intergovernmental body for 47 European nations, including the 27 member states of the European Union. Lawmakers from the member states’ national parliaments make up the council’s assembly.

Andorra, Ireland, Malta and Poland were singled out for their failure to decriminalize abortion and for not allowing for the termination of unwanted pregnancies within “reasonable” time limits.

The resolution was adopted by 102 votes to 69 after a four-hour debate and votes on 72 amendments. The vote is not legally binding on the council’s member states, but it provided a gauge of European trends on the issue.

Catholic antiabortion campaigners in Poland had urged the parliamentarians to reject the proposed resolution, saying it would strike at “basic human rights to life and development.”

The Polish Federation of Pro-Life Movements, a grouping of more than 140 organizations, said in an April statement about the resolution, “It is ideological and

ignores verified facts about the effects of the defense of human life in those countries which guarantee this.”

Lawmakers in Poland said the resolution would go against their country’s 1993 pro-life law, which allows pregnancy terminations only in cases of rape, incest, severe fetal damage and danger to a woman’s life and health.

The Polish law has cut officially registered abortions to about 200 a year. However, a report drawn up in advance of the vote by the parliamentary assembly’s committee on equal opportunities said NGOs in Poland had estimated that the country has 180,000 clandestine abortions each year. *-Ecumenical News International*