

Fight against human trafficking is a liberal democrat priority

Liberal representatives from across Europe met on 12 October 2006 in Bucharest to discuss how to fight human trafficking at national and European level in Bucharest, Romania during the annual meeting of the European Women Liberal Network (ELWN). At the end of the meeting, participants agreed to set up an **anti-trafficking liberal network**. ELDR Congress delegates adopted the resolution put forward by the ELWN on combating human trafficking on 13 October (see <http://www.eldr.org/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=919>).

ELWN Chair Androula Vassiliou (former MP, United Democrats, Cyprus) made a plea to ELWN members to step up the fight against trafficking. *"We, the liberal and democratic women of Europe cannot sit in apathy, doing nothing. We have a duty, first towards ourselves as women and towards our sisters around the world and all civilised people, to be involved and assist in whatever way we can in the fight against this organised crime,"* she declared.

She introduced human trafficking as one of the most profitable crimes, 3rd after drug- and weapon smuggling. Every year, some 4 million people (of which 80% women and children) fall victim to trafficking and used mainly for sexual purposes. 600,000 people are sold annually in Europe alone. Various factors contribute to trafficking including poverty, unemployment and lack of education, however according to Vassiliou, the main driver is demand. Trafficking has created a huge network of profiteers and if it is to be fought, all actors involved must assist in fighting this organised crime. Vassiliou concluded by stating that if this resolution is adopted, a priority must be a coordinated follow-up by the main parties.

Aidan Mc Quade, Director of Anti-Slavery International, member of the EU expert group on human trafficking, United Kingdom, focussed on trafficking for forced labour and labour exploitation of migrant workers, based on a study undertaken in the Czech Republic, Ireland Portugal and the UK. He commenced by mentioning various indicators of forced labour (which is more than merely sexual exploitation), such as physical harm, restriction of movement, debt bondage and withholding wages. He then discussed factors affecting exploitation and trafficking:

- *Migration and labour regulation*: migrant workers are particularly vulnerable targets, which is stimulated by economic imbalances. Significantly, contrary to assumption, most migrants enter the country legally. Therefore smuggling (illegal crossing of borders) must not be confused with trafficking (exploitation). It is not a prerequisite for trafficking.
- *Complexity of migration and labour regulations*: traffickers exploit migrants' confusion
- *Demand for cheap labour*: the political actors should allow for safe movement of people and are not adequately responding

- *Lack of coordination and differing interests of political actors and the state:* i.e. labour markets needs versus migrant and labour laws

Furthermore, Mc Quade gave various recommendations in combating trafficking.

- *Building an understanding of trafficking:* exploitation rather than means of arrival should be addressed. Relevant actors should be actively targeted and further research should be conducted.
- *Responding to and protecting trafficked people:* at present the Palermo Protocol and the Council of Europe Convention exist. However, only two countries have signed the Convention - Romania and Bulgaria. Further suggestions included: appointing and empowering individual national rapporteurs; building national and local apparatus; using pilot initiatives to develop best practices and granting unconditional residency status.
- *Prevention of trafficking through:* information and advocacy supports need to be provided to migrant workers at the earliest possible stage.

The second speaker, **Karin Riis-Jorgensen**, MEP, 1st Vice-President ALDE, Venstre, Denmark, introduced trafficking as a pan-European problem, and stressed particularly the importance of awareness. She emphasized the need to tackle the problem of women who are sent back and immediately picked up again by traffickers at bus stops. She suggested various means of addressing trafficking, concentrating on awareness (also on the customer's side) and mentioned that the EP is in the process of establishing a European anti-trafficking day. Furthermore, she mentioned the importance of the Social Fund and network of NGOs. Also EUROPOL must be used to train police, judges, prosecutors and create networks between them. The "name and shame" principle can also help.

Riis-Jorgensen also commented on the situation in Romania. She said a clear strategy is indispensable. There needs to be less talk and more action. The situation in Romania could be better according to Riis-Jorgensen (i.e. improving the social fund, awareness- education programs, etc.).

Lastly, **Norica Nicolai**, Senator, chair Romanian Liberal Women Organisation, PNL, Romania addressed the situation in Romania. There are various legal frameworks in place to address the problem, such as the International Convention and the European Convention of Human Rights. However, the legal framework was set up relatively late in Romania, only in 2001 (National Strategy for Combating Trafficking of Women and Children). She stressed that the problem should be treated in an inter-disciplinary manner. Civil society plays a crucial role in combating and helping victims. Romania is a transit country however it has been a country of origin and is becoming increasingly a country of demand. Figures demonstrate that a higher number of people are officially involved than previously, and this is easily explained by the money and market offers. An example of a typical trafficking route would be: Romania, Hungary, Serbia Montenegro, Albania,

Greece/ Western Europe. To address the problem, there is already training for prosecutors, however this must also start for judges. In order to combat the problem, it is important to know how the crime influences society.

Lastly Nicolai suggested various causes of trafficking, such as the social situation (person, economy, salary, poverty), rate of unemployment, education and the type of model of success (many women are attracted by a false model of success). She concluded by stressing the importance of having a partnership between states and civil society and suggested setting up a network (i.e. Women for Women) within the Liberal group. Apparently a similar proposal, by Liberal Democrat Liz Lynn, has been passed in the EP.

Finally, a suggestion was made to use people who have experienced trafficking in order to give the problem a face. In practice, this appears to help address the problem. Also harmonising legislation is important.

Some participants also visited an emergency shelter for women victims of violence run by Romanian local authorities with support from UNFPA (Centrul pentru Sanatatea Familiei Buftea) and a shelter for long term residence (Patriarhul Justianian Mariana) on 14 October. The study-visit was organised in partnership with Senator Norica Nicolai (PNL, Romania) and the Romanian agency for the protection of family.

ELWN members and the ELDR Secretariat made a donation to Mr Catalin Florin Dabu for his dedication and efficient management of the shelter Patriarhul Justianian Mariana.