

# Bulgarian Gender Equality Coalition



Royal Netherlands Embassy



Gender Project for Bulgaria Foundation



Council of Europe Information Center

Project: "Bulgarian Gender Equality Coalition – Becoming a Broad Basis for Personal and Institutional Change"

## INFORMATION SHEET № 6

Sixth Forum of Bulgarian Gender Equality Coalition – 27<sup>th</sup> February 2006

Council of Europe Information Centre

**THEME: Models of legalization of prostitution and the risk of violence and exploitation (The legalization of prostitution: prevention or cause of violence)**

**MEDIATOR:** Tatyana Kmetova – Center for Women's Studies and Policies /CWSP/

**PARTICIPANTS:** Representatives of NGOs, health organizations, state institutions, the Children, Youth and Sports Affairs Committee with the National Parliament, sociologists and psychologists

**ISSUES DISCUSSED:**

- 1) Open position of Bulgarian Women's Lobby on the elaboration of a law to legalize prostitution  
**Genoveva Tisheva**, Bulgarian Gender Research Foundation
- 2) Prostitution and violence against women  
**Nadia Kojuharova**, Foundation "Animus Association"
- 3) Goals and approaches to the legal regulation of prostitution  
**Roza Dimova**, CWSP
- 4) The legal regulation of prostitution and its consequences for public health  
**Violeta Kandjikova**, Health and Social Development Foundation
- 5) Is there political willingness to adopt a law for regulation of prostitution  
**Antoni Galabov**, sociologist /Bulgarian Academy of Sciences/

The interest to this particular issue was provoked by the frequent public circulation of ideas about the elaboration of a draft law on legalization of prostitution in Bulgaria. The Coalition members have spoken out on the issue on various occasions, so the discussion was vivid, involving a lot of diverse arguments and positions. The official position of Bulgarian Women's Lobby /member of the European Women's Lobby/ **against** the legalization of prostitution was presented. This document is widely supported by a great number of NGOs

working on gender equality issues. It was emphasized that prostitution can be regarded as a violation of human rights and as such should not be legalized, particularly in Bulgarian social and economic context.

The speakers presented and the participants discussed different models of legal regulation of prostitution, among which were the Swedish model (that criminalizes the buying of sex, and decriminalizes the selling of sex) and the German model (decriminalization of prostitution through civil and labour legislation). The close connection of prostitution with organized crime was also pointed out; this fact accounts for the serious lobbyist interests intertwined in the debate. Prostitution should not be viewed as a single isolated issue; it must be positioned in the wider context of human trafficking, domestic violence, the pornographic industry, advertising and even beauty contests. Prostitution is also affected by general economic tendencies such as globalization and the liberalization of market.

Some of the Forum participants contributed to the discussion with a labour point of view and the issue of prostitution and social insurance. As prostitution is now a large sector of the underground economy, it is all done at the expense of legally employed and tax-paying citizens. In this way the people involved in prostitution dodge their social responsibilities and at the end of their lives they can only rely on state welfare programs paid again by the legal taxpayers. This provides an argument for those who support the legal labour regulation of prostitution and the elaboration of mechanisms for effective control of this criminal sector of economy.

The Coalition members all agreed that the public debate about the legalization of prostitution should not be conducted without the participation of the persons directly involved – the women and men who provide this service. However, it is very difficult to get them to express their active position on the matter.

Another problem is the lack of legal definition of prostitution in Bulgarian legislation. The Forum participants raised the questions about the purpose of the future law and whether Bulgarian society is ready to accept it. It was pointed out that the elaboration of a law without the participation of all stakeholders and extensive study of public opinion would be dangerous and even harmful. The civil society actors must work actively and promote public awareness and a broad public debate so that a future law is the most correspondent to public attitudes, which would make it efficient. Bulgaria Gender Equality Coalition offered to hand over the Forum materials to the Children, Youth and Sports Committee and to provide experts to consult the possible draft law on prostitution.

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