Parliamentary Assembly
Assemblée parlementaire
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Doc. 12920
26 April 2012

Criminalising the purchase of sex to combat the trafficking of people for sexual exploitation

Motion for a recommendation
tabled by Mr Luca VOLONTÈ and other members of the Assembly

This motion has not been discussed in the Assembly and commits only those who have signed it

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Trafficking in people for sexual exploitation is a form of modern slavery that undermines the dignity of victims. The expansion of the European Union has meant greater freedom of movement and travel. This has, unfortunately, made it easier than ever for criminals to develop networks for trafficking in human beings.

Choices for domestic policy on the legal status of prostitution have been shown to have a direct effect on the incidence of human trafficking inflows. Consequently, countries where the purchase of sex is either tolerated or legal are more likely to be recipients of victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation.

Even where the legalisation of prostitution has been accompanied by measures to ensure the industry is well regulated and controlled, such as the Netherlands, criminal groups are still able to exploit underage or clandestine victims.

Legislation focused on criminalising the purchase of sex in order to bear down on the demand, as well as criminalising third party sellers (consisting of pimps and traffickers), while eliminating any criminal status for those personally selling sex and ensuring services are available to help them get out of the sex industry such as job training, however, has shown positive effects on reducing the demand for trafficking. Such a model would also be beneficial in ensuring better protection of the victims. Sweden, first country to adopt it, has shown considerable reduction in inflow of trafficked people.

The Council of Europe should act, with a view to prompting member states to introduce legislation criminalising the purchase of sex, decriminalising the person in prostitution and ensuring adequate services to help people in prostitution to find an alternative. This would be an important contribution to the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on tackling trafficking in human beings which calls on signatory states to address the issue of demand.

Signed (see overleaf)

Signed[1]*:*

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