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**1ST CONFERENCE 2017**  
**ROME**  
  
**on**  
**THE NORDIC MODEL RESPONSE TO PROSTITUTION**  
**AND SEX TRAFFICKING**

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**20th January, 2017**  
**YWCA Conference Hall**  
**Rome, Italy**

**PREMISE**

In the last twenty to thirty years, the trafficking of young women and children from poor countries to Europe for sexual exploitation has greatly changed the face of prostitution in Europe.

The response of European governments to this presence and to the problem has thus generally been to legalise and introduce state regulation of prostitution.

At national and international forums, prostitution and trafficking have generated discussion and raised different complex issues at various levels, due to the large presence of these young women and children from poor countries, who are forced/induced into prostitution in the West.

The debate is divided into two general lines of arguments:

- a) The first line of argument asks for state regulation of prostitution activities and for the designation of certain areas in cities where prostitution activities may be freely practised. It asks that prostitution be recognised as employment and treated in the same way as activities in the employment world. It argues that prostitution can be accepted as an employment choice for women, where they are allowed full and free expression of their sexuality.
  
- b) The other line of argument considers prostitution as a violation of the human rights and dignity of women and as violence against women by men. It rejects prostitution being considered an employment possibility for women and holds that it is incompatible with the fight by society to attain equality between men and women. It holds that prostitution directly causes and promotes the trafficking and sexual exploitation of women and

children and that as long as society accepts and promotes the commercialisation of women's bodies, it shall not be possible to defeat the trafficking of women and children for sexual exploitation.

In the last few years, however, in recognition of the patriarchal structure of prostitution and sex trafficking and following the United Nations legal instruments and policies on these issues, many countries of the world, especially European countries, are moving away from the legalisation and state regulation of these activities, towards the approach generally known as the *NORDIC MODEL*. The Nordic Model is predicated on three fundamental criteria:

1. That those commonly known as "prostitutes" become such mostly due to circumstances beyond their control and due to their need for survival. As such, they must not be punished for engaging in prostitution activities. All laws which penalise and stigmatise them must therefore be removed and their rights must be protected;
2. That the discussion must therefore be shifted to those who buy "prostitutes" for sexual services as they are those who make a choice, having the economic power to do so;
3. That the State must provide necessary and adequate resources to encourage and assist those willing to exit prostitution to do so in a dignified and valid manner.

As one of the countries at the forefront of the problem of sex trafficking and prostitution, due to the huge influx of trafficking victims into its territory, the Italian Government is searching for an adequate and effective response to these problems.

In such a situation, we believe that it is necessary to reflect on why some men need to buy women's bodies for sex.

We believe that it is necessary to reflect on the way women in prostitution live the experience.

We believe that it is also necessary to reflect on problems relating to prostitution and trafficking from various points of view, including the social, cultural, economic, medical, psychological and political points of view.

The Italian Government is very much concerned about eliminating and fighting against gender-based violence in all its various forms and is equally keen in its promotion of gender equality.

To this end, it has signed and ratified the various international legal instruments which call for State members to discourage the demand for paid sexual services, in recognition of its contribution to sex trafficking and to other related criminal activities.

For these motives, **Associazione IROKO** (Iroko Charity), in collaboration with **Unione Donne Italiane of Naples (UDI NAPOLI)**, **Resistenza Femminista** and other national and international partners decided to convene this international meeting in order to favour an exchange of ideas and experiences on the above stated issues, and to encourage the Nordic Model in Italy as a valid choice for its citizens.

The Seminar was also intended to be a joint moment of meditation on the problem of sex trafficking and prostitution, in order to indicate appropriate response and policies to the Italian government, which would be in line with recent trends in the European Union and with other European governments, and with respect to the provisions of international legal instruments.

The International Seminar was directed to professionals, social operators, NGOs and GOs, directors, functionaries and all those who work on problems of trafficking and prostitution.

The conference was intended to be an intervention on one of the thorniest social problems of our times and at the same time, be a moment of training and meditation on the following aspects:

- The effect of legalisation and state regulation of prostitution on prostitution and trafficking;
- The demand for paid sex: myths and realities of a hidden world;
- Victims of trafficking and prostitution: what answers could be given to their social, health, psychological and economic problems;
- Women in prostitution: what possibilities and alternatives could be offered to women who are able to come out of prostitution.

**Speech by Grégoire Théry, Executive director of CAP International**

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**Presentation of the French Act Aiming to Strengthen the Fight Against the Prostitution System and to Assist Prostituted Persons.**

On the 6 April 2016, the French National Assembly adopted, upon its third and final reading, the proposed Act Aiming to Strengthen the Fight Against the Prostitution System and to Assist Prostituted Persons. The Act came into force on 13 April 2016.

Thanks to strong measures against pimping and, in 1946, the closure of brothels, France has been able to limit pimping within its territory. However until now, it had not provided the means necessary to genuinely reduce prostitution – which is a violation of the dignity of the person and a form of violence – or to effectively protect victims of prostitution, who were typically abandoned to their own fate. For the first time, comprehensive legislation provides the scope to meet these two objectives, by:

- **Ending the repression of victims of prostitution, by abolishing the offence of solicitation.** This provision, indispensable for enabling access to common law and an exit pathway from prostitution, is also of considerable symbolic importance. Prohibited in France since 1939, the offence of solicitation has, historically, imposed liability on victims for their own exploitation. It is noteworthy that, between 1946 and 1958, solicitation was more heavily penalised than pimping. Removing the misdemeanour of solicitation from the criminal justice system, together with the numerous measures benefitting victims, shifts the focus towards combatting discrimination, and will help restore confidence in government and public agencies.

- **Creating access to exit pathways out of prostitution, nationally.** The Bill effectively created a comprehensive policy to help prostituted persons navigate oftentimes challenging or blocked pathways (into housing, employment, healthcare, etc.), which operates at the departmental (equivalent to county) level. This policy, of “State organisations-services”, will be granted its own budget dedicated to implementing prevention programs and to supporting victims. Any prostituted person who is not eligible to receive social welfare payments will be entitled to obtain financial assistance to help with social and professional reintegration.
- **Ensuring protection and support to all victims, including non-citizens.** The Act allows tax debt forgiveness for anyone wishing to exit prostitution. It also permits the grant of a temporary residency permit as a protective measure for foreign victims, even where they are not in a position to stand witness against their trafficking or pimping network. This is conditional upon an undertaking to exit prostitution, so as to ensure that trafficking and pimping networks cannot take advantage of the provision. The Act also reinforces compensation provisions for victims of pimping by requiring the State to indemnify victims where the convicted pimp is held to be insolvent.
- **Reducing prostitution by prohibiting the purchase of any sex act .** The Act generalises the prohibition of the use of the prostitution of another person. The criminalisation of the purchase of any sex act affirms that no one has the right to exploit the precariousness and vulnerability of another by imposing a sex act in exchange for money. By addressing demand, the Act effectively deters pimping networks from investing in a territory whose legislation is unfavourable towards the profits of crime. Lastly, the Act protects anyone remaining in prostitution by offering them, for the first time, a legal deterrent that will help them enforce their “conditions” against potentially abusive sex buyers.

**Act no 2016-444 of the 13th April 2016, Aiming to Strengthen the Fight Against the Prostitution System and to Assist Prostituted Persons**

**Article 1**

Creation of an obligation upon internet service providers to promptly inform the competent public authorities of any content that violates the Act in respect of pimping, and to make public the means and measures they devote to combatting such illegal activities.

*(Amends article 6 of Act Number 2004-575 of the 21 st June 2004 for Confidence in the Digital Economy)*

**Article 2**

Formal integration into social workers’ training programs of a module on the prevention of prostitution, and how to identify situations that may involve prostitution, pimping and human trafficking.

*(Amends article L.451-1 of the Family and Social Action Code)*

### **Article 3**

Provides an option, where appropriate, for victims of pimping and human trafficking, and members of their families, to benefit from an enhanced protection mechanism when acting as witnesses or pressing charges. Victims of pimping and human trafficking may use the address of their lawyer or an approved organisation for court and trial purposes.

*(Adds article 706-40-1 to Title XVII of Book IV of the Code of Criminal Procedure)*

### **Article 4**

The offence of human trafficking is included within the findings that can be set forth by labour inspectors.

*(Completes article L.8112-2 of the Labour Code)*

### **Article 5**

Creates, a county agency in every department (county), which shall be responsible for organising and coordinating the response to victims of prostitution, pimping and human trafficking. Creates an exit route from prostitution, together with social and professional reintegration:

- Provision of accommodation for victims of prostitution, pimping and human trafficking in social reintegration housing;
- Access to tax debt forgiveness;
- Access for foreign victims to a protective temporary residency permit;
- Creation of a financial aid payment to assist with social and professional reintegration, for prostituted persons who are not eligible to receive either basic social welfare payments or the financial assistance provided to asylum seekers.

*(Amends article L121-9 of the Family and Social Action Code)*

### **Article 6**

Inclusion of victims of prostitution, pimping and human trafficking on the list of groups that have priority access to social housing.

*(Amends Article L441-1 of the Building and Dwellings Code)*

### **Article 7**

Creates, within the government budget, a fund for the prevention of prostitution and for the provision of social and professional support to prostituted persons. This fund will be made available to initiatives intended to: create public awareness about the negative health effects of prostitution; reduce the associated health risks; prevent entry into

prostitution; reintegrate prostituted persons. The fund will be financed and maintained by the State budget and through the seizure of assets/proceeds derived from pimping and human trafficking.

*(Completes article L121-9 of the Family and Social Action Code)*

#### **Article 8**

Enables the automatic issue of a protective temporary residency permit to victims of pimping and human trafficking who have brought proceedings against the perpetrators. Opens up the possibility of the grant of a protective temporary residency permit to victims of pimping and human trafficking who have not brought proceedings against the perpetrators, but who have left prostitution and who are on the exit route out of prostitution.

*(Amends articles L316-1 and L316-1-1 of the Code governing the Entry and Stay of Foreigners and the Right of Asylum)*

#### **Article 9**

Inclusion of organisations approved to monitor the exit route out of prostitution on the list of organisations that can obtain State financial assistance to house prostituted persons and victims of pimping and human trafficking.

*(Amends article L851-1 of the Social Security Code)*

#### **Article 10**

Extends the option of accommodation in social reintegration housing to persons who are victims of pimping, formerly available only to victims of human trafficking.

*(Amends article L.345-1 of the Family and Social Action Code)*

#### **Article 11**

Establishes ‘aggravating circumstances’ for violence, sexual aggression and rape committed against a prostituted person.

*(Amends articles 222-3, 222-8, 222-10, 222-12 and 222-13 of the Penal Code)*

#### **Article 12**

Gives access to the right to full compensation for damages suffered by victims of pimping, in the event that the pimp is bankrupt/insolvent.

*(Amends article 706-3 of the Penal Procedures Code)*

#### **Article 13**

The option for organisations, with the agreement of the victim, to join as a private party in criminal proceedings for pimping. Organisations recognised as having a Public Utility may join as private parties without the agreement of the victim (in particular, where the victim has not brought charges).

*(Amends article 2-22 of the Penal Procedures Code)*

#### **Article 14**

Creates a right for victims of human trafficking or aggravated pimping to request that court proceedings be held in camera.

*(Amends article 306 of the Penal Procedures Code)*

#### **Articles 15 and 16**

Abolishes the offence of soliciting (which had criminalised the solicitation of clients by prostituted persons since 1939).

*(Amends article 225-10-1 of the Penal Code)*

#### **Article 17**

Creates a national health, social and psychological risk reduction policy, approved by Government order.

*(Creates article L.1181-1 of Title VII of the 1 st Book of the First Section of the Public Health Code)*

#### **Article 18**

Implements a national information policy setting out the realities of prostitution and the dangers of the commodification of the human body, for use in educational establishments.

*(Amends article 312-17-1 of the Education Code)*

#### **Article 19**

Incorporates the promotion of gender equality into sex education classes taught in educational establishments.

*(Completes article L312-16 of the Education Code)*

#### **Article 20**

Creates a new offence of resorting to the prostitution of another by prohibiting the purchase of a sex act. This new offence is of the 5 th class, punishable by a fine of 1,500 euros. For repeat offences, acts will be considered as criminal offences punishable by a fine of 3,750 euros. Resorting to the prostitution of a minor or vulnerable individual is retained as a criminal offence punishable by a sentence of 3 years' imprisonment.

*(Creates article 611-1 of the Penal Code and amends article 225-12-1 of the Penal Code)*



### **Article 21**

Creation of a supplementary penalty, consisting of the obligation to complete an awareness course on the subject of combatting the purchase of sex acts.

*(Amends articles 131-16 and 225-20 of the Penal Code).*

### **Article 22**

Two years after enactment, the government shall submit an evaluation report on the new law to parliament.

### **Article 23**

The Act is applicable throughout French territory.

### **Speech by Agnete Strøm, Women's Front of Norway**



The organisation started out in the Seventies to study pornography and we discovered a world where women were a commodity. We cannot see the differences between how the women are presented in pornography and how women are presented in prostitution.

Today you have heard Gregoire explain the French law: it is an ambitious step forward and I hope the Italian lawmakers and feminists will learn from this law. That is at the moment the best we have.

I will tell you about how we got the law in Norway in 2009.

### **Experiences and memories to hand over:**

- Analyse what turns men into consumers of commercial sex. Analyse the demand
  - The aggressive global sex industry,
  - the development of sex tourism,
  - the new pornographic sites on Internet

are all targeting men to turn them into consumers of commercial sex.

Globally we see an increase in the demand for commercial sex,

- and more women have to be coerced, groomed, triggered into prostitution,
- and trafficking grows.

➤ Organise grassroots women, and share your knowledge!

The list of important actors in Norway during these 30 years of work is long and I will name them:

- the women's movement,
- the feminists in academia,
- the female dominated trade unions,
- other trade unions,
- women and youth in the political parties.
- networking with organisations internationally
- invite as many as possible to take part and join forces.
- and here the survivors of prostitution are a new strong voice to listen to.

To get new sectors of the society, new generations, new activists on board takes different approaches. It is necessary to have tightly coordinated campaigns and at the same time let newcomers take the ball and do their own things.

= All in all: the strength we have built has made it possible for all of us to lobby the political parties in power.

### **Our stand is that prostitution is violence**

The Nordic model stands out as an example of lawmaking that

- penalizes men,
- and protects women,
- reduces prostitution and trafficking.

The following contribution was first proposed by Agnete Strøm during her participation in *The World Summit: End Sexual Exploitation 2025*, 11 -12 May 2015, The Carter Center of Atlanta, Georgia, US.

### **Norway – the law that criminalises the buying of sex was introduced in January 2009, what happened before?**

#### **What happened since?**

In Norway the idea of criminalising the demand for paid sexual access to human bodies, the buyers of sex, started 1981. From 1979 to 1981 a fieldwork and research program took place targeting prostituted young girls in the streets of Oslo, geared at offering them an exit out of prostitution. When the program ended, one of the recommendations to the municipality of Oslo was **to criminalise the buyers of sex**, saying that

“- such a law could be a tool in the work to limit the demand, and

- to signal clearly that the society does not accept the buying of a human being.
- such a law could make potential clients reluctant to become active clients,
- and that active clients would not repeat the action.”

The Oslo project collaborated closely with a Swedish outreach program, and some years later they too recommended the criminalisation of the buyers.

The feminist movements in both countries did policy advocacy for such a law. In Norway it took 30 years before the law was passed in 2009, ten years after Sweden. The majority of the population was in favour of the law and they still are.

Norwegian national laws:

Since 1884 selling of sexual access has not been a criminal offence and since then no prostituted women or men have been arrested for selling.

When in 2009 the buying of sex was criminalised, Norway already had several other laws in place: a ban on pimping, brothels, the buying of sex from minors and the trafficking of human beings.

Internationally Norway has signed the UN Convention of 1949, the CEDAW Declaration, the Palermo Protocol and the European Convention against Trafficking of Human Beings.

The Norwegian law covers the same topics as the Swedish law. But the rationale of the law differs: in Sweden the law focuses on equality between women and men.

In Norway the main rationale for implementing the law against commercial sex was to prevent and reduce human trafficking in Norway. That said, by making it illegal to buy sexual access, the Norwegian government wanted to:

1. change attitudes in the population
2. reduce the size of the Norwegian sex market by constraining supply and demand
3. prevent entry into prostitution and hence to reduce possible sexual exploitation of women in prostitution.

The law also seeks:

- to protect people in prostitution and
- to help people with the transit out of prostitution and becoming a survivor.

### **Evaluation:**

In 2014, five years after adopting the law, the Norwegian government evaluated its effects.

### **Main findings**

- The ban on purchasing sexual services has
  - **reduced demand for prostituted sex**
  - and thus contributes to **reducing the extent of prostitution** in Norway.
- The enforcement of the law, in combination with the laws against trafficking and pimping, makes Norway a **less attractive** country for prostitution-based trafficking than what would have been the case if the law had not been adopted.

- Furthermore, following the implementation of the law, the **economic conditions for prostitution in Norway are reduced**
  - = These effects are in line with the intentions of the law.

### **Effect on attitudes**

Young men in Norway have changed their attitudes towards buying sex more than older men. The law has had a normative effect on people's behaviour.

### **Market reduction**

The ban on purchasing sex in combination with the ban on pimping and brothels have made it harder to sell sexual activities in Norway. The possible costs for the actors benefitting from others' prostitution have thus increased and their profit has been reduced. **This has affected the supply side of the market and contributed to less prostitution in comparison to a situation without a law.**

### **Less attractive for human traffickers**

A reduced market and increased law enforcement increase the risks for human traffickers. The profit from human trafficking is also reduced due to these factors. **The law has thus affected important pull factors and reduced the extent of human trafficking in Norway in comparison to a situation without a law.**

**There would have been 35 % more prostitution in Norway today if we did not have the law.**

### *The prostituted women*

The vast majority of the prostituted women, 86 – 93 %, are foreigners; and the majority here is West-African women, from Nigeria, and East-European women mainly from Bulgaria, Romania. They have no legal documents and are heavily in dept. They are controlled by violence and manipulation and are traumatised, but some of them try to escape and seek help to exit prostitution.

A part of the human rights aspect of the Nordic Model is the exit programs but your access to the exit programs is defined by your legal status:

- being a Norwegian you access to all the help you need.
- being from another European country outside the Nordic countries you will have the right to some support programs.
- but those most in need Nigerian women illegally in Norway, without legal papers, have only one option to go to the police and tell them that she is a victim of trafficking. She will then get a six months reflection period. Then the police have to confirm to the immigration office that four criteria have been fulfilled:
  - the victim has broken away from the traffickers;
  - she/he has filed a police complaint against the traffickers;
  - the complaint has led to police investigations; and
  - the police considers the presence of the victim in Norway to be necessary for the investigation.

Then she will have a permit of residence that can last for this period 2-3 years. But if the police think her case is too thin, they will not take it and she will be deported out of the country.

If she asks for asylum, she will be sent back to the first country in Europe that she set foot in, to seek asylum from there, but more or less she will be back in prostitution, and not a survivor that she hoped for.

This lack of rights for immigrant prostituted women comes from the Dublin agreement, and we will press hard that Norway will insist of granting these women the right to seek asylum while in Norway.

The control mechanism built into the European Convention on trafficking, GRETA, has investigated Norway's performance and has recommended that Norway scale up their exit programs to meet the real need.

When someone in the public debate is saying: *Look, the law has no effect! Prostitution is still going on.*

Our answer to this is:

*The law is a good tool, a necessary tool, but it is not a magic stick.*

- The law cannot stop the global economical crises,
- the law cannot stop wars,
- the law cannot stop natural disasters.

but

The Nordic model stands out as an example of lawmaking that

- penalizes men,
- reduce prostitution,
- and protects women.

Now I will give you some information about *Amnesty International*.

Amnesty made the decision to recognise prostitution as sex work in Dublin in 2015 and said that their position was based on four pieces of research from four different countries. One of these countries was Norway.

The title of the report about Norway was this: "*The human cost of crushing the market: the criminalisation of sex work in Norway*". That was the title, but: who is criminalised in Norway? The pimps, the brothels owners, the traffickers, the johns. But Amnesty makes a title that implies that those who are selling sex are criminalised. They are not.

In the first page of their report they write: "*This report is a part of a series of research reports*". But is it research? Did they do a good job? Was it right to name it as research? The research carried out by Amnesty is, according to them, qualitative; so they state this document does not present its finding in quantitative terms.

They make well write this, but their report is nevertheless not independent research; it stands out as biased and we cannot let Amnesty get away with this biased way to treat an important issue and call it research.

Why did they pick Norway? What is special with Norway? Sweden had had the law for 15 years, for example.

In 2013 in Norway we got a new government and those parties said 'vote for us and we will take away the law' and they gained the majority and formed a government.

That is why Norway was interesting for Amnesty, which carried out its research in 2014. The Amnesty report could become a pull factor so that the government would actually do what they had promised and take away the law.

Now we are in 2017, 3 years after the research was published, and the government has not taken away the law. They have said that they will not do it during this period.

A huge part of the report is a so called desk-based research on a selection of articles written – many of them before the law - by academics that Amnesty quotes heavily. The articles written after the law are mostly by three academics: two of whom were active up against the Honeyball report when it was debated and voted on in the European Parliament. They signed the international paper against Honeyball together with sex workers alliances around the world world. We have two academics that have been working ten years or more against the Norwegian law that criminalises the buying of sex. This is their kind of academic research: opinion, not research!

It's difficult for a reader to know this. But there is one report, written in 2012, **made** headlines internationally and called *Dangerous liaison*, which states that violence had been increased after the ban on buying sex in Norway and that the persons in prostitution have experienced more violence after the law.

This report is quoted twenty-six times in the Amnesty research, without saying that the institutions that ordered that report in fact had to take it back the day after they launched the report. Because when you are saying violence has increased you are comparing it to something else: the two things they were comparing, 2012 and 2009, are not comparable at all; the questions were not the same.

In 2012 you have added more examples of violence and there were only 9 women interviewed.

Amnesty also interviewed a senior advisor at the Ministry of Justice, the head of the Police of Oslo and they were able to re-read what they had said and agree that it was accurate, but when the report came out their interviews had been cut and pasted out of recognition. But when these people saw the Amnesty report they publicly attacked Amnesty for what they had done, saying that Amnesty had just made a report that suited them, that what they said in their interviews had been taken out of context.

I will end by saying that you cannot legalise away the violence and the harm. Violence is inherent in prostitution but Amnesty, who want to legalise prostitution, do not address the harm. Reading their report on Norway, we question the whole foundation of Amnesty; it seems inconceivable to advocate for women's rights and gender equality, as Amnesty does, and on the other side designate a whole category of person for whom lives of humiliation, attacks on their dignity and violence, would be acceptable. The traffickers are the only ones that Amnesty excludes from the decriminalisation, but prostitution and trafficking of women are inseparable. Consenting women are insufficient to satisfy the sex trade so pimps' networks force women into this activity to fill the gap.

93% of prostituted women Norway are foreigners. Amnesty, of course, condemns forced prostitution and declares 'voluntary prostitution' acceptable. It is no longer that prostituted women's situations, made up of daily humiliation and violence, which are questioned, but only whether they were forced into this situation or not.

I would like to thank Esohe Aghatise. Everything we know in Norway about human trafficking we learned from Esohe. She is well-known in Norway in the women's movement, as well as in high schools and universities where the police force is educated. She is also well-known by politicians from several parties, by trade unions. I usually do not get emotional, but I do get emotional when I think about all that you have given us.

## Speech by Marie Merklinger, an activist at SPACE International



### Personal experience of prostitution

I was over 42 years old when I entered prostitution - I was in a situation of complete desperation about paying my bills. In Germany at that age you're too old for the job market because when you turn about 45 or 50 employers cannot fire you because of social circumstances, so they try to avoid hiring older people. So I thought about what I could do and did everything I could to fix my situation myself, because like many women I felt like I was strong and feminist and I wanted to manage my life and deal with this situation on my own. I tried every job, but then I thought about prostitution and my take on it at the time was that *you can sell yourself, it's like a one-night-stand, it's legal, it's a job like any other, why not? I'm a strong person, I'm a grounded woman.*

I put an advertisement on the internet - it's very easy and costs about €30 per month to add your profile - and it didn't take more than about 15-20 minutes before the first john approached me. I don't want to talk about all the specific instances of violence I experienced, like gang bangs other examples - I think it's enough to tell you that I experienced them. What I found out is that it's extremely painful and requires you to work against yourself, against your instincts; you have to allow someone who you normally wouldn't want to even touch, to actually penetrate you. They do what they want to do with you. When I was negotiating with the johns, it was always about what they wanted to do with me, and I had to say I liked things like 'deep throat' because I thought if I didn't say those things they wouldn't want to buy me. So of course I gave consent, but I needed the money. It was not about fulfilling my sexuality; it required completely giving up my own personality, my soul, my wishes and desires.

### Personal impact of prostitution

Then I found a job, which was limited to one year, because I had never stopped looking for a regular job. Only at this point did I realise I had been deeply traumatised. During the time that I was in prostitution, I never thought it was traumatising me, but then I started waking up in the morning crying, feeling completely desperate, moody and and I didn't recognise myself. It soon became clear that the only possible reason for my state at the time must have been my experiences in prostitution, so I tried to find help. But when I approached my county, where there are 5 major brothels, for help, I was told that they had never needed that before, nobody had ever reached out for this kind of help before. So I went to the government health service for prostituted women, but they also told me that nobody had ever asked for help. They said 'we know most women don't prostitute themselves by choice, but we can't do anything'. So my desperation turned into anger.

### The birth of an activist

I started writing on blogs on the internet and I did some research on the situation in Germany and found out that in the roughly 300 counties we have in Germany, there are about 30 programmes associated with health for prostituted women, 20 of which are pro-prostitution and mainly offer help to enter the sex industry. They offer help with testing and things like that. And so my activism started.

The effect of my activism is that I know a lot about the situation in Germany and I talk a lot to the women; not the academics, not the escorts, who are themselves often pimps. I talk to the women in the brothels, 90% of whom are from Bulgaria and Romania and most of them are Romany, which means they are from a minority in their home countries and they are persecuted all over the world. They haven't found anywhere where they can stay and be accepted. I asked these women 'if I offered you a job, would you leave prostitution?' and they replied 'immediately! Just pay me €2 per hour and I'd take a job, just to get out of this.' Their experience of German men isn't a positive one; they see them as ugly and dirty and offering no respect.

### **The ugly truth of prostitution in Germany**

Now I'd like to highlight a few facts. There was a trial a few months ago, after a woman jumped out of the window of a brothel because she had been beaten by her pimp. She went to the police and reported it, but the judge said it wasn't a crime, but was simply a workplace accident, a risk of the job. So she had to pay for the trial. "*The brothels in Germany are very safe - it's safe and legal if you have a legal system of prostitution,*" (Marie says sarcastically). We have had several cases of women beaten nearly to death in German brothels, one of which happened nearly 2 years ago in Cologne, in the middle of the city. A woman was beaten into a coma and she is still in a coma today in a German hospital. Her two children are alone in Bulgaria. That shows the safety of prostitution. It doesn't matter if you do it in a car, in the woods, in a backyard, in a nice hotel or in a so-called 'safe brothel'; you're always alone with a man you don't know. He could be a serial killer, a rapist, he could be anyone. You always put yourself in danger if you are alone with a man, especially if you don't know them, especially if you want money from them and especially if they know that. They always push your limits a bit further, asking you to do more and more.

Now I'll tell you about what's possible. It's possible to have a gang bang with pregnant women. It's documented that Teenie Tina who was 6 months pregnant had a gang bang with 15 men, where it was prohibited to use a condom. They did it 3 times, until she was in the ninth month of her pregnancy<sup>1</sup>. We tried to prevent this, but the police said it was a job like any other and it was her choice. That's what's possible in Germany. There are also 75-year-old women who still have to sell themselves on the street because they've done it all their lives and they don't have any money left to live during their retirement.

I'd also like to talk about STIs, which apparently are not a big problem; a few years ago the Robert Koch Institute<sup>2</sup> said that prostituted women are actually less infected than the rest of the population in Germany. But a few weeks ago the government health service made an emergency appeal to increase the use of condoms because there is a big problem with syphilis, which should be concerning for everyone. In Germany we now have syphilis bacteria which are resistant to the last antibiotic we have; the emergency antibiotic. So if people are infected now with syphilis it might be a death sentence for them because it cannot be cured without effective antibiotics. In Stuttgart, which is one of the towns for which we have statistics, 90% of the prostitutes are infected with syphilis and not only infections from the vagina, although the nature of syphilis is that it spreads throughout your whole system, but infections starting in the eyes or mouth because both the johns and the women think it's safer. So these women could go blind<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> It was later clarified by Chiara Carpita and Esohe Aghatise that the gang bang referred to consisted of the pregnant woman on a gynaecological chair surrounded by the men wearing hoods, so they couldn't be identified. There are photos and videos of this experience, which can still be found on the internet. Carpita adds that in pornography this kind of act is common.

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.rki.de/EN/Home/homepage\\_node.html](https://www.rki.de/EN/Home/homepage_node.html)

<sup>3</sup> At the end of the speech Chiara Carpita, in her role as translator, referred to a German psychotherapist, Ingeborg Kraus, who has published research on trauma and prostitution, which includes a detailed description of the sexual services offered by brothels and the various options johns can choose from a 'menu'.



## **Elvira Reale, a psychologist, Associazione Salute Donna in Naples**

I wrote an article in a magazine entitled '*A letter to my daughter*' when my daughter was 14 years old. The article explained to her what would happen, the harm that would be caused to new generations if the proposed change in the law was approved. In 2014 and 2015 two groups of MPs in the Italian parliament re-launched the topic of legalisation of prostitution, proposing a change to the Merlin law. They tried to show the advantages of legalisation, specifically focusing on the German model. So now we, along with other women's groups, are creating an opposition to this proposal in parliament, working towards a draft law in line with the Nordic model. The first change to the law was proposed by Maturani, then a second change on the same theme was proposed by Bini.

### **Prostitution as gender-based violence**

We published a report in 2015 on sex trafficking and prostitution, the conclusion of which is that both prostitution and sex trafficking constitute gender-based violence. We now need to talk about this political subject, the classification of prostitution as a gender-based violence, within a group that would include women's shelters, representatives from different feminist groups, trade unions and the medical community. We need to develop a specific message to deliver to all of these different people. The message to women's shelters and feminist groups is that they cannot ignore or exclude prostitution as something different from male violence against women, especially because prostitutes are a group of women who are most subject to violence. This is not only from traffickers but also punters. If we consider the statistics, **more than 60% of victims of violence are prostitutes**. So the message to these groups is that if they work to tackle violence against women, work with prostituted women must fall within this remit. Prostitution must be considered a matter of urgency within the wider context of gender-based violence and in the context of health.

### **Prostitution and Health**

When referring to health, the problem I am concerned with is not only sexually transmitted disease, but above all mental and psychological health. I have 30 years' experience and in this time we've seen that **within the group of women who are victims of violence 30% suffer from depression, whereas in the group of prostitutes who are victims of violence, the percentage who suffer from depression is as high as 60-80%**. This is an emergency within an emergency; the emergency for prostituted women, within the wider emergency among women as a whole.

### **Sex work?**

Now we turn to the question of 'work', another matter of urgency. If we analyse prostitution as a form of 'work', it's one which no inspector would allow to continue. We close Chinese factories based on the conditions, but we don't close the brothels where women work full-time in unhygienic and unsanitary conditions. If this kind of workplace existed in any other field of work, it would be closed down immediately. But there are no inspections. It's not a job which can be regulated, there can't be guaranteed safety conditions in the work environment of prostitution because it's not a job.

### **Education and Equality**

The last issue is education. The risk is that the message we pass onto younger generations, by accepting prostitution as a form of work, will be disastrous because we cannot achieve gender equality in this way. I invite Chiara to bring these things together, by writing a kind of leaflet outlining the consequences from a health perspective and also in terms of education. Our politicians talk about introducing a compulsory programme in schools promoting gender equality, while seeking to regulate prostitution. From my perspective these two proposals are mutually exclusive; they cannot do both. We need to engage all of the countries who have legalised prostitution or who plan to do so, to pass on the message that this is a paradox; they have no right to talk about gender equality in schools or other institutions if they promote prostitution, which is exactly the opposite of equality. Prostitution prevents equality.

## Stefania Cantatore, Unione Donne in Italia, Naples



It's obvious that there is a dramatic situation for those who are caught up in the world of prostitution and the sex industry. I'm also involved in this as a professional context, having collaborated with the part of the prefecture, called CIDD<sup>4</sup>, which is concerned with the implementation of the 1958 Merlin Law banning brothels. It took 10 years to implement the law, including the creation of CIDD and its associated services for ex-prostitutes, so by the time the organisation was set up, the brothels had already been closed and the women had already exited prostitution. It was a situation where most of the women who had exited the brothels had been damaged by this delay in the provision of services by this institution that was supposed to take care of their needs. I was involved in politics, but not directly in issues related to prostitution, but when I started to look into this issue I realised the hypocrisy of political groups about the question of people who had been in prostitution. They were only concerned about their exit from prostitution and teaching them to become good citizens. I call them hypocrites because there was no public discussion of prostitution by politicians or the mass media, except in terms of public order. It was referred to as a question of criminality, alongside drug problems and other crimes, as if prostitution were a similar kind of crime committed by women. Alongside the denial of the continued existence of prostitution, politicians also denied the existence of violence against women in general. So we need to consider these two issues together and look at the common root cause: the promotion of the right of men to commit violence against women.

In 2002 we prepared a kind of anti-violence protocol and that was the beginning of people starting to talk about gender-based violence. We used the word femicide, which people were scandalised by and we were accused of using violent terms. There was even a newspaper article about this and women on the left, who described themselves as feminists, were among the loudest saying we were using terms that didn't belong in politics, but actually constituted a private arrangement between adults. Women who described themselves as feminists were not able to recognise the violence that was evident in prostitution and refused to recognise the fact that people who were close to them, their neighbours, could be involved in this violence as well. I'm saying this because there was a huge problem amongst feminists, who were unable to recognise prostitution as a political issue, because they still hadn't recognised the fact that gender-based violence is a political issue. We've been accused of trying to reduce women to a minority by using the word victim. It is a difficult word for people to accept because it relates to the status of women. But we, and many others like us, consider this word very important. It's not something that reduces women, but something that recognises a victim as the only witness to the situation of violence against women. It is a privileged word because it places these women in a strong position to give testimony about what violence is. If we, as society, change the way we view victimhood and to some extent manage to reclaim the word victim, then as a result individual women, including prostitutes, will be more able and willing to recognise themselves as victims. Since prostitutes don't want to be recognised as victims of their situation, you find them wanting to be left out as if these were questions that related to other people and not to them.

We have a situation of the so-called feminists considering prostituted women as socially and economically independent, having a kind of false power. Whereas, in reality, prostituted women can end up defending their exploiters because they are unable to recognise them as such. At my age I have no wish to waste more time trying to convince the feminist

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<sup>4</sup> Centro Italiano di Difesa della Donna. The organisation was born in 1950 in support of the Merlin law proposal and it was funded by the Ministry of the Interior and worked jointly with the local Prefectures.

movement of these issues. I need to focus on political activities to achieve some concrete results. I have been involved in the question of violence against women and of prostitution and I want to maintain my optimism that in a few years we'll find that those who are feminist and want to fight for gender equality will no longer support those who promote prostitution. I want to believe this. Our goal is to expose the exploitation of women in prostitution as a political strategy.