



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings

Speech of Ms. Eva Biaudet,
OSCE Special Representative for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings
at the
EU Ministerial Conference
“Towards Global EU Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings”
in
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Excellencies, Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen, distinguished participants, dear friends and colleagues,

I would like to thank the Minister of Justice of Sweden, Ms. Ask for the invitation to speak here at the EU Ministerial Conference. I believe that the participation of ministers from so many EU and other countries shows the political importance given to the issue of trafficking.

The pictures you can see behind me are documentary photographs by Ms. Dana Popa, portraying survivors of sex trafficking and their experiences. These women have been lured and sold into trafficking, simply because they wanted a better life for themselves and their families.

I am convinced that those who have experienced trafficking live with their experience all their life. However, with appropriate assistance and support victims may hopefully manage to take back their lives into their own hands. It is our responsibility as decision-makers and policy-makers to ensure that victims of trafficking are more effectively identified, that they receive adequate assistance, and that they are protected from further victimisation and exploitation.

Most importantly, we must make a much greater effort to stop trafficking and prevent it from happening in the first place. I urge you all: It is time to face the facts and look reality in the eye and realize that exploitation of people in vulnerable situations is taking place in our societies. It somehow seems to be tolerated because it does not touch us politically or personally. I find it very hard to understand any excuse for this prevailing tolerance for the undignified treatment and exploitation of other humans. In my mind, such tolerance belongs only to history – not to our contemporary civilization.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

For victims of trafficking to be able to regain their dignity and their self-esteem, States must engage in comprehensive and holistic assistance and support to victims. Assisting victims can be complex, as victims need low-threshold support, as well as tailor-made, long-term empowerment and rehabilitation. Our experience tells us that partnerships between State actors and civil society is key to any victim assistance measure. In this respect, it is important that NGOs as service providers are engaged as equal counterparts.

In terms of international partnership, local level social services often have little tradition to work internationally. At the same time, the EU's mandate does not cover such services. However, this must not lead us to believe that a foreign victim, especially a child victim - whatever the legal status of that child for staying in the country - is none of the concern of the local authorities and their existing child protection obligations. When it comes to the protection of victims of trafficking we therefore need to ensure that also within the EU, local level authorities, including social services and child protection, can cooperate internationally in order to assist victims of trafficking in a comprehensive way and make sure the victim's basic rights are protected.

We know, based on recent research, that victims of trafficking often show similar symptoms of trauma to victims of torture. They may need long term recovery and support before they even are able to be helpful in the police investigations or express verbally the events of their ordeal. A UK study on professional helpers showed that often practitioners, law enforcement and social services alike, make themselves guilty of "a culture of disbelief" in not wanting to understand what the victim is talking about.

In stopping this violation of human rights, victim identification is indeed a challenge, partly because victims themselves are often reluctant to disclose their ordeal. However, when and if victims do tell about their experiences and exploitation, we owe it to them to be more prepared to believe their story. This can only happen if professionals and NGO-workers, who come into contact with victims, are trained to recognize trafficking in human beings - seeing the complex chain of events at large - and learn to understand the effects and consequences of the serious trauma involved. To become more successful, the assistance provided, including legal assistance, must be given to presumed victims even without knowing whether the victim is capable or willing to assist in criminal proceedings. Evidence shows, that providing security and sustainable safety to victims also enhances their cooperation with law enforcement authorities. We must also ensure that compassion and respect for human dignity and equality are concretely upheld through out all procedures and contacts.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The key to fighting trafficking is to understand the trends and patterns of the often complex and changing manifestations of abuse and exploitation, which culminate in the most extreme form of exploitation, namely trafficking in human beings. We also need to know whether our efforts to tackle trafficking are effective. We need to create systematic mechanisms of monitoring and analysis of trafficking information, as well as of the accountability of our work. That is why I am advocating for the National Rapporteur or equivalent mechanism, which was called for already in the EU Hague

Declaration more than a decade ago, as well as in the OSCE Action Plan and the Council of Europe Convention.

I welcome the EU's continued strong commitment to the establishment of National Rapporteurs or equivalent mechanisms (as outlined in the proposed new Framework Decision). Our experience of studying such mechanisms in OSCE participating States shows that the National Rapporteur or equivalent mechanism should report transparently and in an independent way, but also needs to be adequately funded for it to function usefully. Sufficient access to all relevant information and data is a prerequisite for comprehensive analysis. The reports by the National Rapporteur can at best be a platform for political and public debate on priorities to combat trafficking. The National Rapporteur or equivalent mechanism is, in our experience, key to improving the effectiveness of national anti-trafficking policy and practice. Having a National Rapporteur or equivalent mechanism in each country will support better allocation of human and financial resources to the fight against trafficking and will surely take us to the next level to become more successful in our common endeavour. Furthermore, I am convinced that the National Rapporteur or equivalent mechanism will be helpful and a source of relevant information when implementing and monitoring also international obligations.

OSCE as an organization has been a pioneer in working against trafficking and serves as a platform for cooperation, dialogue and change. In my nearly three years in office, I have seen how countries look to us for advice and how we have been able to assist countries to enhance their anti-trafficking efforts. I greatly value our co-operation with the European Union in combating human trafficking, both within the EU and in relations with third countries. I believe our work complements and supports each other and I look forward to continuous co-operation in fighting this modern day slavery.

To conclude,

Kofi Annan once said: "We have the means and the capacity to deal with our problems, if only we can find the political will". We owe it to the countless victims of this modern-day slavery to find that will.

Thank you.