

(English only)

Conference “The Public-Private Partnership in the Fight Against Human Trafficking”

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Panel 1 - Understanding human trafficking in the private economy - forms, industries and sectors involved, latest trends and responsibility of the private sector

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Dear Excellencies, Ladies and Gentleman,

Baltic Sea States and the Secretariat I represent have long prioritised the multi-stakeholder, inclusive partnerships and broad issue of decent and fair labour in our region. Our eleven Member States and the European Union have adopted many policies of mutual benefit over the years and have grown together into one of the most dynamic regions. The development however has not always been linear or straightforward and new challenges arise from time to time which test our resilience to the tougher times. We were all touched by the most recent recession and new migration reality and in this part of the region the effects were stark.

On 20 June 2017, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Baltic Sea Region and a representative of the EU met at the Ministerial in Reykjavik and adopted the Reykjavik Declaration. Sustainable development, and prevention of human trafficking are among the main priorities for future work in the BSR region.

Sustainable development and growth is of course an ultimate goal for states and businesses. However, we can not reach growth if people are exploited and their rights are violated.

The Council of the Baltic Sea States has approached the topic of labour from a range of perspectives over the years – here today I would like to outline a few of the current approaches and initiatives in which we are engaged. Our work across the organisation highlights the opportunities, the risks and the potential when we take a look at the issues we face in the pursuit of an ever developing labour market. What we have realised private sector does not want to engage in the conversation only about the risks, we need to talk about the opportunities as well.

A well functioning labour market and labour mobility issues are strongly linked with migration. In relation to this I want to highlight the work of the CBSS in coordinating the Baltic Sea Labour Forum (BSLF). The BSLF is the cooperation body where public – private bodies work together to create sustainable and free of exploitation regional labour markets within the Baltic Sea Region.

Among the recent activities in the framework of the BSLF I would like to point out the newly initiated **Baltic Leadership Programme (BLP)** supported by the Swedish Institute. This programme promotes and improves the cooperation in the field of labour mobility - to handle problems that people face while moving for work in another country.

BLP targets specifically representatives of the relevant national authorities dealing with employment, social security and migration, from organisations associating employers, from trade unions and cross-border partnerships, as well as from organisations and political platforms in the Baltic Sea Region working actively with labour mobility.

As we live in globalised and interconnected world today, labour mobility in most cases of course is a good thing but there are also associated and unintended risks. Unfortunately exploitation of workers and in some cases trafficking for forced labour is also a part of this larger mobility scenario and we cannot ignore the negatives involved. Due to the changes in the labour market, increased competition and restructuring of work is pressing down prices, private businesses therefore rely more and more on low skilled and low paid workers and migrant workers, for example in such sectors as cleaning and restaurant sectors. Both are labour-intensive sectors, where labour form a large part of the overall costs.

There is growing evidence on the prevalence of widespread labour exploitation and abuse of migrant workers at the European level, new migration reality causes even more risks for migrants. Experts admit that migrants now at the extremely high risk to be exploited, especially undocumented migrants. For example, when migrant women working in the cleaning company in Sweden complained to the employer about very low payment, the response was – nobody needs you here, I am doing you a favour paying you something. This is dangerous attitude that facilitates and justifies exploitation.

Despite the risks and high price the business might pay for being associated with human trafficking for forced labour, the private sector is reluctant to get involved in combating trafficking for labour exploitation. We have observed

that there is reluctance from state officials to raise these issues when talking to private sector as well. This is forbidden and sensitive topic in a way. However employers are key actors in the prevention of labour exploitation and the corporate responsibility requires that businesses do not contribute to or cause trafficking through their operations i.e. ‘through their own activities or as a result of their business relationships.

We are trying to find a language how to communicate with private sector and the Incentives for business is a key to strengthen the dialogue with private sector. **The important issue here is: for the societies, for businesses, for worker to benefit from labour mobility social welfare and decent work should be the corner stones of our labour markets.**

The CBSS is also putting strong emphasis on strengthening the role of local actors in mapping instances of exploitation at local level and detecting populations at risk, as well as raising general awareness. In Russia, various trainings and prevention activities have been organized in St. Petersburg and Leningrad oblast by our partner - Russian Red Cross. It is important to make sure that all prevention efforts are integrated in broader policies addressing, for example, labour mobility, gender equality, eradication of poverty and migration management.

To end on a positive note, I would also like to bring an example of the CBSS work with entrepreneurship and innovation. For the past 4 years the CBSS has been running the programme Balticlub, together with the Swedish Institute. The programme brings together young entrepreneurs and creatives from the Baltic Sea region, while focusing on encouraging start-up culture in the region. The aim of Balticlub is to encourage talented and active young professionals to explore the potential of starting their own businesses in the Baltic Sea Region countries, exchange knowledge and know-how and open up new job opportunities through this for themselves and their communities. Among other things young entrepreneurs are discussing risks of trafficking and importance to ensure fair working conditions to all workers as human trafficking is a crime that is all of our responsibility. This is the title of our current anti-trafficking T-shirt campaign initiated to raise awareness that human trafficking affects us all and to extend a special thank you to TF-THB partners, supporters and friends in common endeavours in eradicate human trafficking in the Baltic Sea region.