

**Benita Ferrero-Waldner**

European Commissioner for External Relations and European  
Neighbourhood Policy

## **Combating Trafficking in Human Beings – the EU's response**

Check Against Delivery  
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi  
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

High-level Conference on Combating Trafficking in Human  
Beings, Especially Women and Children

**Vienna, 17 March 2006**

Mr. Secretary-General,  
Madame Minister, dear Liese,  
Mr. Executive Director,  
Dear Helga Konrad,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am glad to be able to join you today for this conference on a highly important issue. Trafficking of human beings is a severe assault on our common humanity. With the tremendous advances for human rights over the course of the last 60 years, it seems incredible that human beings, and particularly women and child, are still bought, sold and hired out, like commodities, in our world including in Europe today. And despite increased efforts to tackle this trade, the uncomfortable truth is that trafficking people is sometimes an even more profitable business than trafficking weapons. It is a shocking state of affairs.

I don't need to remind this audience of the destruction this phenomenon inflicts on the lives of those affected. Nor of the tremendous law enforcement and human rights challenges it represents. Who has met victims of trafficking has been horrified by their heart-wrenching stories of violence, deprivation and cruelty. I am sure you share my determination, to do everything in our power to combat this hateful crime against human dignity.

Since taking office in November 2004, my fellow Commissioners and I have made the fight against human trafficking a high priority of the Barroso Commission. Together with my colleague Franco Frattini I presented a Communication last year emphasising our commitment to the issue, setting out our overall approach and proposing an action plan for the future. It's also a regular topic of discussion at our Commissioners' meetings on Fundamental Rights. But of course we do more than discuss. I am happy to note in this context that the project which gave birth to this conference, namely the provision of comprehensive training for law enforcement authorities combating child trafficking, is co-funded by the European Commission.

Trafficking needs a comprehensive approach. That is why we focus equally on the so-called "three P's" – Prevention, Protection and Prosecution. Prevention of trafficking, the protection of victims and the effective prosecution of traffickers are the three cornerstones of our counter-trafficking policy. At the heart of which lies the protection of human rights and human security.

The comprehensive approach also applies to the different actors in the field of trafficking, which is why initiatives to share experiences and collect best practices are so important, as you have been doing in the run-up to this conference.

And it applies to cooperation with international and regional organisations, which is why I am very glad to witness this example of the EU's fruitful collaboration with the OSCE. For many years we have cooperated with its Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). Now, we can take it to another level, together with the Special Representative on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings. Let me take this opportunity to pay tribute to Helga Konrad's excellent work, particularly through the "Alliance against Trafficking in Persons". We are relative newcomers to the alliance, and our membership is another signal of the heightened importance we place on fighting human trafficking.

A comprehensive approach also means focusing on the entire chain of trafficking, from the countries of origin, through the countries of transit to the countries of destination. This is an approach we have adopted through the EU's various programmes.

Within the EU our Daphne and AGIS programmes target a wide-range of activities. They focus on combating violence against children, young people and women, and supporting police and judicial cooperation, including projects such as the one which culminated in this conference.

With our neighbours, which are both transit and origin countries, we work through our European Neighbourhood Programme (ENP). This is a relatively new programme designed to support our neighbours' transition processes by offering incentives to make the tough political decisions and reforms required. As our neighbours make steps towards increased democracy, rule of law, human rights and market economy, we offer rewards in the form of a stake in our internal market, participation in EU programmes, and increased financing.

ENP is based on Action Plans tailored to each country's situation, so wherever trafficking is a problem, there's a commitment in the Action Plan to tackle it. At the Moldova-Ukraine border for example we have started an €8 million border assistance mission providing on the job training and advice to Moldovan and Ukrainian officials. The idea is that by reinforcing their capacity to carry out effective controls and border surveillance we will reduce the level of human trafficking, as well as other criminal activity.

Throughout our neighbourhood we are helping to build institutions that enforce the rule of law and promote respect for human rights. This is a key element for implementing commitments on institutional and practical protection and rehabilitation of victims of trafficking.

Further afield we work through our bilateral and regional programmes to fight some of the root causes of trafficking – poverty, gender equality, and the rule of law. It is poverty and its related factors, especially education, which lie behind the continued exploitation of women and children. That is why long term development actions designed to empower and educate women and girls are so vital. Through our AENEAS programme we are also helping countries with financial and technical assistance specifically designed to help fight human trafficking.

All these activities will be given further impetus by the EU Action Plan on combating trafficking in human beings we proposed in our Communication, which I am pleased to say is now in place.

There are also a number of other tools which we have recently adopted to give us a more comprehensive approach to trafficking.

- Last month we agreed a new thematic programme on migration which focuses on protecting migrants against exploitation and exclusion and targeting networks of traffickers. It is very clear that the focus is the traffickers, not the trafficked, and it will maintain the human rights orientation that underscores our Action Plan.
- Earlier this month we adopted a roadmap on equality, which identifies the eradication of gender-based violence and trafficking as one of the top priorities for the EU for the coming years.
- And later this year we will put forward a Communication on children's rights. This will increase the attention paid to children's rights across the Commission, ensuring that all policies are analysed for their impact on children before they are adopted.

Above all, we will focus on implementing the Action Plan on combating trafficking, for which I know I can rely on the motivation and expertise of our Expert Group. Many of its members are here today, so let me take this opportunity to repeat the Commission's thanks for your dedication and hard work in support of our Communication and now the Action Plan.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me close by congratulating you all again on the initiative that led to this conference and for your commitment to ending the scourge of human trafficking. I wish you fruitful discussions today to make best use of some concrete outcomes, such as the statement of good practice for separated and unaccompanied children.

A reinforced cooperation between the OSCE, the EU and its member states, Europol and all of you gathered here today, will help our collective efforts to turn the tide against the traffickers.

The lives they blight and sometimes destroy must be reclaimed. Women and children, wherever they are in the world must be safe from the predatory smugglers who deprive them of their basic human rights and human dignity. And the criminals involved in this despicable global business must be brought to justice.

You can count on my commitment and that of the European Commission in achieving those goals. We are determined our mandate will not pass without us making a difference on this phenomenon which represents a stain on the collective conscience of the world. By working together, we can and will make a difference.

Thank you.