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Cyprus Women's Lobby organizes conference on prostitution and violence against women

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The European Parliament Office in Cyprus and the Cyprus Women's Lobby organized a one day press seminar on **"Violence against Women and Prostitution"** on Wednesday 28 November. The aim of the seminar was to initiate a public dialogue on the issue of women in prostitution in the EU and Cyprus as there are alarming signs of rising prostitution as a result of the crisis. Many academics, activists and policy



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makers view prostitution as a form of violence against women and believe the system should be abolished. Others view prostitution as a profession and a result of women's free choice; therefore they argue that prostitution should be legal and regulated with the intent to protect the rights of sex workers. The seminar aimed to explore and examine the European Parliament's stance, the different state policies and their impact on women in prostitution, the users of prostitution services, and society at large from a women's rights and gender equality perspective.

This event was the first to concretely address prostitution, and to propose contributions to analyse the phenomenon from a gender perspective. The event was a great success: the room was packed with over 80 engaged participants and the press coverage was extensive (see below). It was a key opportunity to discuss the current situation in Europe and in Cyprus, and to raise awareness about the various legislative options with regards to prostitution.

Minister of Interior Eleni Mavrou opened the conference by reminding participants that ending violence against women should be everyone's priority, in order to break the silence surrounding it. Then, participants watched a video message



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from Mojca Kleva, Member of the European Parliament, in which she highlighted the urgency to tackle prostitution in order to stop trafficking in women and girls.

The first panel of the conference gave an overview of the situation in Europe and provided examples of different approaches towards prostitution. Stigamot Director Gudrun Jonsdottir presented the current situation in Iceland, which has passed a law criminalising the buyers and closed down the strip clubs, therefore following the Swedish approach to prostitution, which considers prostitution as a form of violence and the demand as a fuel to organised crime and trafficking. Researcher Karin Werkman made an analysis of the Dutch model, which is based on an opposite approach to Sweden, as the Netherlands decriminalised procuring ten years ago, based on the idea that trafficking and prostitution can be dissociated; Karin Werkman used various official reports which demonstrate the failure of the Dutch policies to address trafficking and protect prostituted persons. EWL Policy Officer Pierrette Pape gave complementary information about the situation in other countries, presenting the positive outcomes of the Swedish model ten years after the adoption of the Swedish sex purchase law, and alerted on recent developments in Spain or Austria, where mega-brothels and prostitution schools are being opened.

The second panel aimed at analysing the situation in Cyprus with regards to prostitution, violence against women and trafficking in women and girls. While Eliza Savvidou, Commissioner for Administration, reminded participants of the legal framework in Cyprus, Rita Superman, Head of Anti-Trafficking Unit of Cyprus Police, highlighted the gaps in the Cyprus legislation for the police to be more efficient, and

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stressed on the links between prostitution and trafficking, by recalling that prostitution is a form of violence, and that there is the growing legal, social and ethical legitimization of sex industry must be questioned. Finally, researcher Demetra Sorvatzioti talked about human dignity, and Josie Christodoulou presented the outcomes of the study on the demand carried out by the Mediterranean Institute for Gender Studies, which go against the usual stereotypes that are presented about the demand side (sex buyers in Cyprus are mainly married men, with university degrees, coming from different age/social/ethnic groups, and who consider women as accessory to love, under the influence of the mass-media and pornography). Josie Christodoulou presented one of the video clips which form part of a project with young men reflecting on prostitution: 'Stop Prostitution'.

You can find all the presentations and photos on the website of the European Parliament Office in Cyprus.

Media coverage:

1. <http://www.sigmalive.com/inbusiness/opinions/internal/giorgos%20vasileiou/544933>
2. <http://www.kathimerini.com.cy/index.php?pageaction=kate&modid=1&artid=114223>
3. <http://www.sigmalive.com/news/local/18728>
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6. <http://www.kathimerini.com.cy/index.php?pageaction=kate&modid=1&artid=114351>
7. <http://www.philenews.com/el-gr/New-Homepage-With-Slider/4995/124394/kypries-se-roz-angelies-stoicheia-sok-giatin-porneia>

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8. <http://cyprusnews.eu/deltia-typou/735532>
9. <http://www.elita.com.cy/el-gr/alla-ekdilwseis/1134/2853/synedrio-via-kata-ton-gynaikon-kai-porneia>
10. <http://cyprusnews.eu/deltia-typou/727500>
11. http://www.inews.com.cy/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=4553%3A%20%80%9Cviolence-against-women-and-prostitution%20%80%9D&Itemid=306&lang=el

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