

March 28<sup>th</sup> 2007  
Sofia



Dear Friends,

A serious part of our work is campaigning for public awareness raising and education on trafficking issues in Bulgaria.

Among others, we release an e-bulletin in Bulgarian and English on current situation on trafficking that is distributed among national and international organizations and anti-trafficking activists. We prepare also a Romani language version that is hopefully going to be released for first time in June.

Please find below extracts of the English language version of the February`2007 Monthly Newsletter of the Bulgarian Network for Prevention of Trafficking of Children and Young People.

The text contains news on reports released by different international organizations, governmental agencies and officially released media information on internal and external trafficking of Bulgarian Roma people.

We believe that this information is of high relevance to our project application since it shows that trafficking of Roma children and women is still a very serious problem in Bulgaria and there is an urgent need for action on behalf of youth Roma groups and NGOs to prevent trafficking and protect the most vulnerable groups: the Roma children and young women.

Thank you very much for your time.

Best regards:

Rada Petrova  
Editor of the Monthly Newsletter of the  
Bulgarian Network for Prevention of Trafficking of Children and Young People

### **U.S. State Dept Trafficking in Persons Report, December 2006**

Bulgaria is a source, transit, and destination country for women and girls trafficked from Romania, Moldova, Russia, Ukraine, Armenia, Lebanon, and Central Asia to and through Bulgaria to Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Kosovo, and Macedonia for the purpose of sexual exploitation. **Roma children were trafficked within Bulgaria and abroad for purposes of forced begging and petty theft. In 2005, Austrian authorities identified 700 Roma children trafficked from Bulgaria** to Austria for forced begging and commercial sexual exploitation. The Ministry of Interior noted an increase of men and boys trafficked for purpose of labour exploitation. -

### **U.S. Dept of Labor Bureau of International Labor Affairs**

CHILD LABOR LAWS AND ENFORCEMENT - The Constitution prohibits forced labour. The Law on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, which entered into force in January 2004, includes measures for the protection and assistance of child victims of trafficking, and created the National Anti-Trafficking Commission to coordinate and construct policy on trafficking. Bulgarian law penalizes trafficking a minor with 2 to 10 years imprisonment and fines. Inducement to prostitution, which is often associated with trafficking, is punishable by 10 to 20 years imprisonment, if the victim was a minor. **Ethnic Roma children are disproportionately represented among victims.**

**Bur of Democracy, Human Rights & Labour** - Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – 2006.

**CHILDREN** – **Widespread poverty led many Romani children to turn to begging, prostitution, and petty crime on the streets. There were reports of child smuggling rings paying Romani women for babies that were later sold to couples in Western Europe.** Police launched 17 investigations in the Burgas and Peshtera areas in connection with the reports, all of which were ongoing at year's end.

**TRAFFICKING IN WOMEN** – **Roma girls and young women were often approached by persons who gained their trust, frequently other young women and acquaintances, who described glamorous work opportunities abroad.** Some were sold into bondage to traffickers by relatives. Unaccompanied young women trying to cross the border into Macedonia, Romania, or Turkey reportedly were at risk of being abducted into trafficking. In larger cities, organized crime groups were often responsible for trafficking, although they used various front companies to pose as employment agencies, escort and intimate services businesses, or tour operators. Small crime groups and freelance operators monopolized trafficking in smaller cities and towns.

### **Concluding Observations Of The Committee On The Rights Of The Child (CRC)**

The Committee is concerned at the lack of an integrated strategy on children as well as of a systematic mechanism to monitor progress in all areas covered by the Convention, and in relation to all groups of children in urban and rural areas, especially those affected by the consequences of the economic transition. The Committee is also concerned about the need to strengthen the State party's capacity to collect and process data to evaluate progress achieved and to assess the impact of policies adopted on children, **in particular the most vulnerable groups of children: the Roma.**

### **Bulgaria, France Crash Human Trafficking Channel**

A channel for traffic in people to France has been crushed by the Bulgarian and French police.

Police in Bulgaria's Russe and French Marseille acted in close cooperation in crushing the channel. **Six Roma people were questioned** in the Bulgarian city and 5 homes were searched. A total of 20 cell phones, many personal belongings as well as bank transfers documents were confiscated during the search.

### **How the new Fagins are bringing child slavery to Britain**

Two years ago, when she was 10, Dochka lost what was left of her innocence when she was sold to a band of child traffickers by her mother and aunt in Bulgaria. Bewildered and terrified, **the little Roma girl was transported to Austria, forced to learn the skills of a pickpocket and put to work.**

### **Europe-Wide Human-Trafficking Ring Cracked**

Authorities across Europe say they have arrested 41 Bulgarians in recent days after Italian police uncovered a trafficking network that exploited hundreds of children. The arrests were in northern Italy, Bulgaria, Germany, and Austria. Italian police say another 75 people have been placed under investigation. Charges against the suspects include enslavement, human trafficking, and drug smuggling.

### **Corruption and Human Trafficking Hinder Bulgaria's EU Entry**

According to the article, the European Commission report from May 16 meant Bulgaria needed to take urgent action in fighting organised crime. The Independent said the report 'painted and alarming picture' of Bulgaria as one of 'Europe's centres of human trafficking'.

### **Initiative to Help Fight Human Trafficking in Three SEE Countries**

Bulgaria, Croatia and Serbia-Montenegro are located in a pivotal zone between poorer countries to the east and the affluent nations of the EU, and function as transit points. Bulgaria has passed key legislation criminalizing trafficking and providing for victim assistance, but corruption has impeded law enforcement efforts.

### **Atrocious Pimping Suspect Arrested In Sofia**

A man suspected of kidnapping, abusing and forcing women into prostitution has been arrested in Sofia, the police disclosed. He had reportedly kidnapped **a number of Roma young women** and is suspected of brutally assaulting many of them and locking them in a cage with a dozen of pit bull dogs.

### **Bulgaria: Baby Trafficking, an article by Anne-Marie Green**

The 30,000 people town of Peshtera lies nestled in heavily wooded hills some 80 kilometres from the Bulgarian capital, Sofia. On the outskirts of the town is a separate area where the Roma or gypsy community lives. Recently constructed bare concrete brick houses are juxtaposed with wood and stone shacks. Relative wealth sits uneasily with dire poverty.

We have come to Peshtera to investigate a new economic activity. Some years ago it emerged that babies born to women from this village were being sold to couples in France. This new form of trafficking came to light when one woman, apparently regretting her decision to sell her baby, went to the authorities and told them what was going on. Further investigation revealed an intricate trail of deception, greed and desperation.

In the Roma community it is common for women to have children at an early age. Large families are common and single mothers can find it hard to cope. Some members of the community have managed to find work within the wider Bulgarian job market, but lack of education and discrimination means many survive on social welfare. Total income for single mothers is €50 a month for their children. Some local people have learned to take advantage of desperation. They approach the woman under the guise of wanting to help out, offering her a few euro to pay for food or clothes for her children. This might continue for some time until she has accumulated a debt. She will then be asked to repay this and it will be suggested that a way of paying what she owes and make some more money is to sell one of her babies.

In many cases the woman is still pregnant when this offer is made. If she agrees arrangements are made to transport her to the buyer's country. Markets for Bulgarian babies have been located in France, Greece, Italy and England. The pregnant woman travels abroad and waits until her baby is born. During this time she stays in a safe house - often in a Roma camp. But food and lodgings cost money and in Greece there have been cases where women were induced early by a doctor in order cut costs.

The babies are sold on the black market but they still need documentation. Various strategies and ruses are employed in order to ensure the adoptive couple have the 'right' to adopt the child. The mother claims the adoptive father is the biological father and 'agrees' to allow him to adopt the child. In order to support this fiction the man, in the months leading up to the birth, will travel to Bulgaria and have his passport stamped. This way he creates the impression that he has been having a relationship with the mother for some time.

Ludmila's daughter Slavca was already five months old when she was sold to a French family. She was offered €3,000 but the 23-year-old held out for €4,000. That's an above average price on account of Ludmila's good looks and pale skin, which would help her daughter blend into a Western European family. Ludmila is a single mother with three other children, from eight months to seven years.

The going rate on the market is anywhere from €5,000 for a girl up to €20,000 for a boy. The mother is usually promised a third of that price, with the rest divided between the traffickers, doctors, lawyers, border officials and all the other parts of this elaborate chain. Women are nearly always cheated of what they were promised - their reduced payment blamed on the cost of travel or false documents. They might receive as little as a few hundred euro for their baby.

Police find it very difficult to break up the criminal gangs involved in this baby trade. Women are complicit in the sale of their children even if they are acting out of economic hardship. They also have a legal right to travel. The 33 people charged by Bulgaria for baby trafficking in the last three years can only hint at the extent of this secret trade.

Many of the trafficking gangs have been broken up but as long as poverty remains within the Roma community, selling one child to make life better for the others will remain a desperate option.

Anne-Marie Green