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Midterm Report

from the

BSPC Working Group on Civil Security

19th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference

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By Line Barfod, Chairman of the BSPC Working Group on Civil Security, member of the Danish Folketing

Dear Colleagues,
Dear Chairman,
Dear Conference

It is a great honour for me as Chairman of the BSPC Working Group on Civil Security to have the opportunity to present the Working Group's Midterm Report here at the 19th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference in this wonderful setting, surrounded by the beautiful and peaceful Åland Islands.

It is now one year since the 18th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference was held at Nyborg in Denmark. It was there that the unanimous decision was taken, in conjunction with the adoption of the final document for the conference, to set up a BSPC Working Group on Civil Security with particular focus on trafficking of human beings. One of the themes of the conference was civil security, and we heard for example OSCE's former special representative and coordinator for trafficking of human beings, Eva Biaudet, talk about the victims of such trafficking.

Trafficking is often associated with women who through force or false promises of work are sold over national borders, ending in prostitution. This is not an incorrect picture, but the victims of trafficking – or slavery which it perhaps should be called – do not just end up in shady environments remote from the everyday lives of normal citizens. Victims also include women, men and children who work as slaves in our private homes – as cleaners, handymen and gardeners. They are exploited in restaurants where we eat, and in hotels where we sleep. They are sold for factory and farmwork, to beg for money, and illegal adoption for the sale of bodily organs.

The background is simple. One side of the story is the demand for cheap labour and sexual services. The other side is that it involves people with poor living conditions and little or no hope of a better future. These market conditions are exploited by traffickers, who lure or force their victims into slavery. They exploit people whose ability to support themselves and their families is negligible or non-existent. This not only occurs in poor countries far from here – it also occurs here in our own region. Humans are traded in exactly the same way as drugs and weapons, but in contrast to drugs and weapon trading where the trafficker can only earn money once, people can be sold again and again. And it is this brutal perspective that makes human trafficking an extremely lucrative business with great potential for profit. At the same time there is little risk of being caught and punished, so human trafficking is one of the fastest growing types of criminality, not only in the Baltic Sea region and Europe, but also in a global context.

International organisations estimate that, on a global level, there are about 2.5 million people who are victims of trafficking in human beings. Trafficking takes place amongst us – and in our region – and these appalling crimes highlight the need and importance for all of us – locally, nationally and internationally – to work on raising the issue of trafficking in human beings. We in the Working

Group are trying to do what we can, but we cannot do this on our own. Fortunately, much has already been done... but much remains to be done.

BSPC's Standing Committee has decided that the Working Group is to have trafficking as its main focus area, but the Group can also consider other aspects of civil security. The Working Group has been given the mandate to formulate political positions and recommendations about civil security issues, and to present guidelines and practical, political proposals. The Working Group members will exchange positive experiences and work to create a political focus on civil security issues – particularly in relation to human trafficking – in the national and regional agendas of the Working Group members.

Finally, the Working Group will work to propose recommendations about civil security and trafficking, in conjunction with the resolution for the 20th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference.

The Working Group is a *political* working group – not a working group of experts. We will try to use our status as a *political* working group to present political recommendations of common interest to the entire Baltic Sea region and also to promote a focus on human trafficking on the national political agendas.

Invitations to participate in the Working Group were sent to all member countries at the end of 2009. Nineteen parliamentarians from regional and national parliaments have joined the working group and, so far, the Working Group has held three meetings. The first was held on the 3rd of February 2010 in Copenhagen, the second on the 8th of April 2010 in Stockholm, and the third on the 10th of June 2010 in Oslo. Here, in conjunction with this 19th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference, the Working Group has also been able to hold a meeting with the Åland Islands Peace Institute.

At the first meeting of the Working Group, we agreed that we would initially focus exclusively on issues concerning human trafficking and decide later on whether we would also take up other aspects of civil security. We made this decision on the grounds that human trafficking is itself a very broad issue involving many, many challenges.

From this perspective, the Working Group agreed on a working plan involving a total of seven scheduled meetings and a series of focus areas. The planned focus areas are as follows: national and regional perspectives concerning human trafficking; economic aspects of human trafficking; victims of human trafficking; children as victims of human trafficking; police and prosecution; and, finally, awareness of human trafficking.

Representatives and experts from organisations such as the CBSS, OSCE and national agencies have participated in the three Working Group meetings held so far, and they have shared their experiences of work to eliminate human trafficking. For example Eva Biaudet, who I mentioned earlier, took part in the group's first meeting, and experts from, for example, police authorities and NGOs have participated in meetings and talked about economic aspects of human trafficking. We discussed whether human trafficking is part of organised crime with the objective of making money, and emphasised the importance of carrying out national and international analyses, involving the police, customs and tax authorities, in order to identify and get to the main traffickers.

In addition to the Working Group meetings, the members have participated in various events and conferences. For example, Maria Stenberg from Sweden and I took part in an IPU conference in London in February this year, where I was a guest speaker.

Before each meeting, the Working Group members prepare a brief about various national conditions concerning initiatives to eliminate human trafficking. On a positive note I can mention that virtually all member countries have national action plans against human trafficking, a national rapporteur or equivalent body, and a national coordinating mechanism. Another issue that the Working Group has examined is the degree to which trade unions and employer organisations are involved in the prevention of human trafficking and assistance to the victims of human trafficking. Unfortunately, this showed that the trade unions and employer organisations in the Baltic Sea region only considered human trafficking in their work to a negligible extent. Consequently, this is something the Working Group wants to work more with in the near future.

As mentioned, one of the things that the Group as a *political* working group can do is to create a focus on human trafficking. We have tried to do this by, for example, writing a joint article on

human trafficking. The article was signed by 11 parliamentary members and shows that consensus can be reached despite different national and party political convictions.

The other thing that we as a *political* working group can do is to make joint political recommendations. On the basis of our studies and experiences, we have reached six provisional recommendations that we have submitted to the BSPC Enlarged Standing Committee as an input to this conference's final document. Again, despite different national and party political convictions, we the Working Group have not found it difficult to reach consensus on the recommendations. Quite simply, human trafficking is far too serious an issue, and it is our hope that the governments of our countries can reach understanding in the same way.

The Working Group's six recommendations are as follows:

- All countries are urged to ratify all relevant international conventions, protocols and decisions, and adapt national legislation, so that all stages of human trafficking are criminalised.
- Countries should acknowledge that human trafficking is an international crime, so international cooperation is required. At the same time, exploitation of the victims takes place locally, so must be fought locally.
- Countries should earmark adequate, permanent and targeted funding and resources to public agencies, NGOs, international organisation and projects such as the CBSS Task Force against Trafficking in Human Beings.
- Countries should work to develop and coordinate the collection of data about human trafficking in order to increase understanding of the problem, to develop the right initiatives against human trafficking, support investigations and prosecutions and to provide the best possible support to victims of human trafficking.
- Countries should work to ensure that the focus is always on the victims. Human trafficking is exploitation, regardless of where it occurs and whatever form it takes. Human rights must be prioritised.
- Countries should work to develop effective methods and models at operational level, ensure that relevant public agencies and NGOs help victims and their families, and increase the number of convictions against traffickers and those engaged in exploitation.

Human trafficking is an issue that concerns us all, wherever we come from, and whatever our political convictions. We have a duty to act, both as citizens and on a political level. We must place requirements that, in our everyday lives, we do not participate in the exploitation of women, men and children that are the victims of trafficking. In the Working Group we have shown that common goals can be set across the political spectrum. Now it is up to the governments of the Baltic States and the EU countries to undertake attainment of the common goals.

Dear Conference,

Together with the vice chairmen of the Working Group, André Oktay Dahl from the Norwegian Parliament and Johan Linander from the Swedish Parliament, and together with the other members of the Working Group, I want to thank you for the opportunity to report on our preliminary results. We are looking forward to the work ahead and to presenting the Working Group's report at the 20th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference – hopefully with good, concrete proposals as to what the governments of our countries and we all can do to eliminate this terrible modern form of slavery.

Thank you for your attention.