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EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

IOM conference on Prevention of and Fighting against Trafficking in Human Beings

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European Union Policies and Outlook on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings

Statement by Mrs Karamanou

Chairperson of the Committee on Women's
Rights and Equal Opportunities of the European
Parliament

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am very pleased and honoured, as Chairperson of the Committee on Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities of the European Parliament, to take part in this Conference on "Prevention, of and Fighting against Trafficking in Human Beings". A conference organised by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), in close co-operation with the European Commission and the European Parliament, in the framework of the EU STOP Programme. I very much welcome the particular focus of the conference on the enhancement of co-operation in the process of enlargement of the EU, since enlargement of the European Union is a high

political priority and an opportunity to discuss matters of common interest to us.

Only one week ago, the Committee on Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities of the European Parliament organised a hearing on the issue of enlargement and what it could mean for women. What enlargement at least should mean is democracy, respect of human rights, respect of the rights of minorities and respect of the rights of women. This brings me on the issue under debate today: European Union Policies and Outlook on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings

I am well aware that trafficking does not only concern women, but it cannot be denied that a very high percentage of human beings that are victim of trafficking are women. 500 000 victims of trafficking enter Western Europe annually, and flows from Central and Eastern European countries have dramatically increased, in addition to the already existing flows from Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean and Asia. Trafficking is a modern form of slavery, and it often leads to forced prostitution. Both these phenomena are intolerable violation of fundamental rights, and the Parliament has requested that fighting them should become the first priority in Community action. You will understand that therefore combating trafficking is of growing concern to our Committee. In my view it is a woman's rights issue strongly related to the issue of equal treatment of women and to the position and image of women in our society.

These facts cannot simply be seen as the negative effects of the transition process that many of the candidate countries are going through. Simply because these problems are not emerging today and are not restricted to the candidate countries But on the other hand, most candidate countries share problems that are of particular concern: trafficking of women and

sexual exploitation, prostitution, under-age prostitution, as well as child pornography.

The Committee on Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities of the European Parliament has always been very active addressing the issues of trafficking in women and sexual exploitation, forms of violence against women that are simply unacceptable. I only refer to the Daphne programme on violence against women (2000-2003). Our committee has been the driving force in the development and success of Daphne. It is my opinion that this programme should continue after 2003, possibly with a reinforcement of the areas of action concerning child sexual abuse and exploitation and trafficking. It is essential that organisations from the applicant countries will be included in these programmes, as they will soon become full members of the European Union.

Besides Daphne, the STOP-programme remains a valuable tool to support projects combating trade in human beings, the sexual exploitation of children and help to victims. The second generation of STOP allows for continued financial assistance until the end of this year.

From 2003 on under the new Programme, action to combat trafficking and sexual exploitation will continue.

Besides these important programmes the last years we have seen proposals coming from the European Commission on combating trafficking in human beings and sexual exploitation of children. On this issue our active and well-respected Member Marianne Eriksson, very

much involved in the theme of trafficking, drafted an opinion.

Recently the European Commission has put forward a legislative proposal on short-term permits of stay for victims of trafficking.

Members of our committee are very much involved in the discussions on this proposal. Ms Patsy Sörensen, member of our committee is the responsible rapporteur for the report of the Committee on civil liberties. Throughout her career Ms Sörensen has been very much involved in the issue of trafficking. As the issue is that important to us, we do not only have Ms Sörensen combating trafficking in the Committee on civil liberties, but also Ms Lousewies Van Der Laan in our own committee doing an opinion on combating illegal immigration and trafficking in human beings.

This proposal responds to the major difficulty we face in the reluctance of victims to cooperate with the competent authorities. It seeks both, to combat networks of traffickers and smugglers and to help persons who find themselves in a particular vulnerable situation, among them many women.

I do recall that these initiatives – action programmes, legislative proposals etc. – are important and you can see for yourself that our committee is active in the field. It is in favour of promoting networks and partnerships between the police, judicial, migration and social authorities, as well as between NGOs and international organisations in the Member States and candidate countries. It also called for enhanced co-operation between the EU and the candidate countries, with the aim of improving legislation against violence against women and increasing the measures to protect victims, including strengthened co-operation with NGOs. Women's NGOs in the candidate countries must receive increased support through the Phare programme.

But to conclude, I would like to refer to what I said at the beginning of my intervention about the position and image of the woman in our society and equal treatment. When we really

want to fight this violence against women, when we really want to combat trafficking, sexual exploitation, domestic slavery, we have to change the position and image of the woman in our society.

Then, close co-operation between the Member States of the EU on judicial matters or matters of reinforced police co-operation, is not enough, although I acknowledge the importance of it. Then, one should go one step ahead, or should I say, one step back and analyse the position and image of the woman in our culture. By doing that we will follow a proactive track that will bear fruit in the long run on a more structural basis. Then we also have to talk about political power, about participation of women at all stages of the decision-making process and more particularly in the elections to the European Parliament in 2004. The phenomenon of the low representation of women in decision-making positions, in all spheres of political and professional life is common to the current Member States of the EU and the candidate countries. As an illustration, I only mention the weak representation of women in the recently created Convention, which will prepare the future of Europe. It is of course important to lay down in the Charter on fundamental rights articles on human dignity (art. 1), prohibition of trafficking and slavery (art. 5) and non-discrimination and equality between women and men (art. 21-23). But if these principles are not reflected in the institutions representing women and men in the EU, if there is no gender balance in these institutions, if women remain to be invisible, if equality will not be accomplished at a political level, then the message is that men are more equal than women, then it will be very difficult to strive for equal treatment of women in society and to improve the image and position of women in our society. Therefore I say that we all should practice what we preach. The

fight against trafficking of women demands that women are playing a key role in this combat.