

EWL News

Sweden - Prostitution put back on the agenda

Posted on 28 September 2012



[Brussels, 28 September 2012] Women’s organisations, including the EWL, met this week in Stockholm to discuss strengthening the legislation which has already made Sweden a model in Europe for its approach to the system of prostitution. In the struggle for equality between women and men, Sweden has been at the forefront of working towards abolishing prostitution. Its 1999 law on violence against women was the first one in Europe to qualify prostitution as a form of male violence and address the demand, by criminalising the purchase of sex. Since then, the Swedish legislation is regularly referred to as the model to promote for many women’s organisations fighting violence against women. As the issue of prostitution starts to be discussed at European level, the Swedish model is being questioned and looked at: **what role will Sweden play in the current debate?**

The Stockholm conference of 26 September was entitled “Sex trade without frontiers – How can the Swedish sex purchase law be strengthened?”, as it aimed at reviving the discussion in Sweden about its policies on prostitution and push politicians and public authorities and agencies to discuss ways to further strengthen the Swedish legislation. By inviting Mariann Fossum, a Norwegian parliamentarian, the [Swedish Women’s Lobby](#) (SWL) and the European Women’s Lobby (EWL) proposed a concrete action: the **extension of the Swedish sex purchase law to apply on Swedish citizens/residents abroad**. Based on the Norwegian model, adopted by Norway in 2008, such new provision would allow addressing sex tourism. Two members of the Parliament were invited to present their view: while the social-democratic party has decided to include this proposal into its new programme, the moderates seem to be shy on the issue. There is nevertheless a need for the Swedish society to look at its policy from a broader perspective, beyond internal implementation: the forward-thinking Swedish legislation

needs to be consistent, with a clear message to all Swedish prostitute-users that they can't buy sex wherever they are on this planet.

At European level, Sweden is regularly quoted as the best practice when it comes to addressing prostitution. By denouncing the system of prostitution as an obstacle to equality between women and men, the Swedish legislation has opened perspectives for women's organisations and human rights activists from various EU countries. Debates are taking place at governmental or parliamentary level in France, Ireland, Northern Ireland, Finland and Denmark. NGOs are mobilizing in Cyprus, Luxembourg, Italy, Belgium... The framing of the issue is shifting from the individual discourse to a societal perspective, based on human rights and equality between women and men. Member of the European Parliament (MEP) Mikael Gustafsson and EWL Policy Officer Pierrette Pape informed about concrete developments at European level, including the mobilization of a growing number of MEPs supporting EWL's campaign '[Together for a Europe free from prostitution](#)'.

In this context, the Swedish model needs to be kept on the political agenda, prioritized and strengthened:

- The implementation of the policy needs to continue to be a priority, with resources, training (police, justice, health professionals, etc.), support to NGOs, alternatives/support for women, education for all
- Sanction towards prostitute-users should be higher and accompanied by education
- More data on the impact of the law should be developed, especially about the assistance to women
- The Swedish approach should keep the broader perspective on prostitution, linking it to the fight against violence against women and the comprehensive work for equality between women and men
- There should be also work on the links between prostitution and pornography, sexualisation of girls, and more sex education for girls and boys
- Sweden should be more vocal about its model in the international scene and develop and support diplomatic actions to spread information and share good practices, both in Europe and outside
- Sweden should invest in and support the abolitionist academics/research
- The issue of procuring should be brought back on the agenda as a key area to address in order to fight organized crime
- There is a need now to mobilise the private sector to take their part of the implementation of the law
- Finally, politicians have to be remobilised on the issue, and men should get on board and speak out against prostitution

The conference was instrumental in bringing back the issue on the Swedish political agenda. Whereas the struggle against prostitution was an entire part of the Swedish politics in the 1990s, it needs a new generation of supporters from all parts of society, starting with the decision-makers and politicians, which should be more actively speaking out to promote the Swedish model against prostitution. Only three out of the 20 Swedish

MEPs have stated their support to EWL campaign: **it's time to mobilise again for the support for the Swedish model** from which we can draw the path towards a Europe free from prostitution.

More information on the Norwegian legislation on prostitution [here](#).

Recent press article about a Norwegian politician being fined for buying sex [abroad](#).

Click here to watch the [conference videos](#).

To see EWL Policy Officer Pierrette Pape's presentation, click [here](#).

