EUROPEAN WOMEN'S LOBBY
EUROPEEN DES FEMMES

EWL STATEMENT

Time to act now to end prostitution and sexual exploitation!

Women's organisations celebrate the first anniversary of the Honeyball resolution

[Brussels, 26 February 2015] One year ago, Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) adopted a historic resolution on 'Prostitution and sexual exploitation and its impact on gender equality', also called the 'Honeyball resolution'[1]. Supported by a large cross-party majority, the resolution sent a strong signal that urgent action is required at European level to end this pervasive violation of women's and girls' human rights.

Several MEPs in this new term are calling on the European Commission and the EU Member States to take action, in a context where the reality of prostitution has been rendered visible through the Carlton case, through which the use of women in prostitution by Dominique Strauss-Kahn and other men has come to light.

EWL President Viviane Teitelbaum says: *"As the Carlton case shows, through the testimonies of some courageous women, we are facing a system which exploits the most vulnerable, perpetuates male domination and fuels trafficking in women. By celebrating the anniversary of the Honeyball resolution, we want to remind the EU and its Member States that the reality of prostitution is a reality of violence and inequalities, which are contrary to the fundamental values of the EU."*

The first anniversary of the Honeyball resolution comes at a timely moment to remind the European Union (EU) and its member states of their obligations towards realising gender equality, guaranteeing women's human rights, and combating trafficking in human beings.

Realising gender equality:

Tackling the system of prostitution should be a priority of the EU actions towards the realisation of gender equality. The European Commission has highlighted the gender dimensions of trafficking and sexual exploitation, both in the EU Directive itself[2] and in the EU Strategy to combat human trafficking. According to Eurostat, sexual exploitation is the most widespread form (62%) of human trafficking in the EU, and women and girls make up the overwhelming majority of all victims at 96%[3].
Moreover, the Honeyball resolution acknowledges that, "Prostitution is a cause and a consequence of gender inequality, which it aggravates further." **We call on EU Commissioner for Gender Equality Ms Jourova to address prostitution and all other forms of violence against women in the new EU Strategy on Gender equality and women's rights.**

"If we want to live in a Europe where women have equal rights and can feel safe and respected, we must work to eliminate prostitution and to create a culture in which it is not permitted or acceptable to

[1] http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&language=EN&reference=P7-TA-2014-0162
[2] Directive 2011/36/EU on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims, and replacing Council Framework Decision 2002/629/JHA
[3] Malmström, C. (2013) 'Trafficking in Human Beings and Gender – the EU Perspective'. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/eu-policy/trafficking-human-beings-and-gender-%E2%80%93-eu-perspective_en

purchase the body of another," MEP Mary Honeyball (UK, S&D)

Guaranteeing women's human rights:

The Honeyball resolution states that prostitution and sexual exploitation are "highly gendered issues and violations of human dignity, contrary to human rights principles, among which gender equality, and therefore contrary to the principles of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, including the goal and the principle of gender equality." The European Commission has reiterated its commitment to the UN 1949 Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others[4], which affirms that "Prostitution and the accompanying evil of the traffic in persons for the purpose of prostitution are incompatible with the dignity and worth of the human person."

However, in 2012, Eurostat asked EU Member States to integrate most of the illegal activities producing wealth in their national statistics, including drug dealing and prostitution. While some countries already count prostitution in their gross domestic product (GDP), others will hasten to do, to be able to play down their debt and their deficit with no consideration for the impact on women and girls in Europe. **The EWL condemns this economic strategy that trivialises the commodification of women's bodies and violence of the prostitute system, and calls on the European Commission to rectify this requirement, based on EU human rights and commitments.**

"As we commemorate 20 years since the Beijing Platform for Action, the EU must reaffirm its commitment to international women's human rights and put people, not the economy, at the centre of its policies and actions. Women's human rights must not be denied or violated for economic reasons," MEP Catherine Bearder (UK, ALDE)

Combating trafficking in human beings:

In several answers to written questions of MEPs, the European Commission recognises the links between prostitution, organised crime and trafficking in human beings[5]. In an intervention in the European Parliament in January 2014, Europol representatives explained that trafficking in human beings, and especially in women and girls, has increased in the countries where prostitution markets have been legalised.[6] Under Article 18(1) of the EU Directive on human trafficking, Member States are obligated "to take appropriate measures, such as education and training, to discourage and reduce the demand that fosters all forms of exploitation related to trafficking in human beings," and must report to the European Commission on their efforts to tackle such demand.

There is increasing evidence that the so-called 'Nordic model', through the criminalisation of the purchase of sex, contributes to deterring trafficking and organised crime. Evaluations in Sweden and Norway have demonstrated that tackling the demand for prostitution is the most strategic and efficient way to reduce trafficking, but also to change mentalities and reduce violence against women.

The EWL calls on the EU and its Member States to acknowledge the links between prostitution and trafficking, and address the demand and the gender stereotypes which support the persistence of the system of prostitution.

"Combating sexual exploitation and the growing sex industry in Europe is an integral part of working for women's human rights. That is why the European Parliament has to take the lead on this issue, demanding the total decriminalisation of women, girls and boys in prostitution, and instead penalising the pimps and buyers of sexual services," MEP Malin Björk (Sweden, GUE-NGL)

[4] 22/07/2013, http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getAllAnswers.do?reference=E-2013-006332&language=EN
[5] 15/10/2014, http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getAllAnswers.do?reference=E-2014-006360&language=EN
[6] http://greenmediabox.eu/archive/2014/01/29/human-trafficking-in-the-eu/ at 1h02

The European Women's Lobby (EWL), together with 200 women's rights NGOs, supports the Brussels' Call 'Together for a Europe free from prostitution' and develops campaigns to raise awareness on the reality of prostitution and sex trafficking and to contribute to social change towards abolitionist policies on prostitution in order to realise gender equality.

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Note to editors:

The **European Women's Lobby** (EWL) is the largest umbrella organisation of women's associations in the European Union (EU), working to promote women's rights and equality between women and men. EWL membership extends to organisations in all 28 EU Member States and three of the candidate countries, as well as to 20 European-wide organisations, representing a total of more than 2000 associations.