

EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AREA
STANDING COMMITTEE
OF THE EFTA STATES

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SUBCOMMITTEE IV ON FLANKING AND HORIZONTAL POLICIES

**Initiatives from the Commission to prevent Trafficking in Women
and Sexual Exploitation of Children**

Comments by the EEA EFTA States

1. The abduction and heinous crimes against children committed in the context of paedophile networks in Belgium last summer shocked and appalled the public all over Europe. At the same time the Stockholm Congress on child abuse and the Vienna Conference on trafficking in women highlighted the international nature of trafficking, abuse and exploitation of women and children for sexual purposes, and lead to a demand for action at both national and international level.
2. Acknowledging the rising problems relating to trafficking in women and sexual exploitation of children, the EEA EFTA States have with interest noted that these issues are now high on the European agenda, and that the Commission is in the process of presenting a series of joint actions aimed to cover the aforementioned issues.
3. The EEA EFTA States appreciate and support the initiatives taken by the Commission in this connection, and would like to stress that even if not all the initiatives are of directly EEA relevance, these issues are of highly political importance also for the EFTA States.
4. The EEA EFTA States are of the opinion that the problems should be addressed at national, regional and European level, and in order to strengthen and co-ordinate European action in these fields, co-operation and consultation between EU and EEA EFTA States should be encouraged. Some of the EEA EFTA States have moreover pointed out the important role that the Council of Europe may play in this connection.
5. More specifically, and with regard to the **Declaration of the Council and the Ministers for Education of 20 December 1996 on the protection of children and countering paedophilia**,¹ the EEA EFTA States acknowledge the key role the education system and in particular teachers and schools can have in protecting children and countering paedophilia. It has been stated from one of the EEA EFTA States that it

¹ OJ C 7, 10.1.97, p.12

is a basic goal for education and training to foster human beings with well balanced personalities and moral strength in order to avoid children becoming victims and to prevent adults from abusing children.

6. As regards sex tourism involving children the EFTA Working Group on Tourism is in the process of submitting EEA EFTA comments on the **Communication from the Commission on combating child sex tourism**². Delegations have underlined that the issue of commercial sexual exploitation of children should not only be considered a problem of the tourist destination concerned, but also of the country of origin of the tourists involved. It will also be stressed in this context that tourism should follow the principles of human rights and fair competition. Delegations have furthermore underlined that the matter should be considered from a broader perspective and not only from a tourist point of view, as child abuse is a problem of the entire society.

7. Moreover, the EEA EFTA States support the multidisciplinary European approach taken towards the problem of trafficking in women. In principle the EFTA States have no objections towards using programmes like Leonardo, Socrates, Youth for Europe and European Voluntary Service to address the problems, as proposed in the **Commission Communication on trafficking in women for the purpose of sexual exploitation**³. The question is, however, to what extent these programmes can prove useful for these purposes. For example, how realistic is it to think that "Youth for Europe" can provide help for young victims? In any case, it seems clear that such projects must be considered on an individual basis like other projects.

8. The EFTA Ad hoc Expert Group on Equal Treatment has expressed an interest in the new budget line allocated for **measures for combating violence against children, adolescent and women** (the Daphne initiative), and would like to follow the development in this area, in view of a possible involvement in 1999.

9. Lastly, any measures limiting the possibility of using Internet to obtain material featuring sexual abuse or exploitation of children are also supported by the EFTA side. The EEA EFTA States therefore welcome the Commission **Communication on illegal and harmful content on the Internet**⁴ and the Commission **Green Paper on the protection of minors and human dignity in audiovisual and information services**⁵.

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² COM (96) 547

³ COM (96) 567 final, 20.11.1996

⁴ COM (96) 487, 16.10.1996

⁵ COM (96) 483, 16.10.1996