

20 October 2021

**Press release on the international online conference
"Ways out of human trafficking and sexual exploitation in the Danube Region"
from 19 to 22 October 2021 in Ulm**

The international online conference "Ways out of Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation in the Danube Region" is currently taking place. The Danube Office Ulm/Neu-Ulm, the City of Ulm, the Ulm Alliance against Human Trafficking and Forced Prostitution, SOLWODI Baden-Württemberg and the Ulm Police Headquarters are bringing together more than 150 selected experts from a total of 10 Danube countries for virtual exchange and transnational networking in order to combat human trafficking in the Danube region more effectively. The Ministry of State supports the conference financially as part of the implementation of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region.

Human trafficking and especially trafficking in women and children along the Danube is a massive problem that requires better cooperation between both the authorities and civil society of the Danube countries. The transnational field of action is characterised by organised crime and corruption. In order to achieve long-term success here, a joint strategy is needed. The interdisciplinary conference will in particular facilitate the exchange of experience and sustainable networking between local authorities, non-governmental organisations and law enforcement agencies from the Danube countries across state and sector borders. The main focus is on the countries Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, the Republic of Moldova and Germany.

In order to ensure an open and trusting exchange on this precarious topic and field of action between the participants, the top priority in selecting and inviting the experts was their trustworthiness, integrity and commitment against corruption. The organising team received expert advice from Veronica Lupu, an internationally active lawyer and anti-corruption expert from the Republic of Moldova.

The conference will be moderated by human rights activist Inge Bell, second chairperson of the women's rights organisation Terre des Femmes and chairperson of Solwodi Bavaria.

The entire conference will take place in an online format. The control centre is located at the Roxy Ulm. Together with Inge Bell, the preparation team has purposefully integrated a lot of space for methods of exchange and interaction into the schedule.

Background:

Since the EU's eastward expansion, human trafficking and sexual exploitation have increased massively. At the same time, the red light has changed massively: Numerous victims of human trafficking and sexual exploitation come from the countries along the Danube.

The Corona crisis has further aggravated the situation. Unemployment and economic hardship are helpful for human traffickers. In order to achieve success in this difficult transnational field of action, networking and a joint strategy of all actors is necessary.

Figures on prostitution in Ulm and Neu-Ulm

At present, 29 establishments with red-light character are officially listed in Ulm and 3 in Neu-Ulm. Before the outbreak of the Corona pandemic, both cities had to deal with almost 220 sex workers every day. The issue does not stop at Ulm and Neu-Ulm.

Quotes:

Gunter Czisch

Lord Mayor of the City of Ulm

"As Lord Mayor of Ulm, it is important for me to take a clear stand on the issue of human trafficking. Since the 1990s, the cities of Ulm and Neu-Ulm have been impulse generators and proven project partners for the cities and regions along the Danube.

This is a deeply inhuman, highly criminal system. Together with our partners along the Danube, we will develop new approaches and build networks to combat human trafficking more effectively. It is about a system that despises human beings, about the "commodity" human being. We must protect the victims with all our strength!

Katrin Albsteiger

Lord Mayor of the City of Neu-Ulm

"As Lord Mayor of Neu-Ulm, I am glad that we are not a hotspot here. Neither Ulm nor Neu-Ulm played a leading role in the police crime statistics of the respective federal state in the past years with regard to human trafficking. But we must not deceive ourselves, the number of unreported cases in this area is much higher. It also happens here.

Through my experience as a former member of the Bundestag, I know how important it is that all sectors in the field of human trafficking pull together and are well networked.

The city of Neu-Ulm is pleased to be able to offer this important and problematic topic a platform for international exchange through the conference."

Marietta Hageney

SOLWODI Ba-Wü e.V. Counselling Centre, Member of the Ulm Alliance

"Prostitution is never the solution. Poor women do not become rich, traumatised and injured women do not become healthy and discriminated women do not become less marginalised. The sex industry thrives on driving women and girls into prostitution and it has developed perfidious methods to recruit them.

We experience every day that for many women prostitution is often the last link in a chain of experiences of violence and abuse, stigmatisation, poverty and lack of prospects. The women and girls try to escape a world full of hardship - but the way out of hardship often ends in misery."

Manfred Paulus

Author and former Chief Superintendent of Criminal Investigation

"Trafficking in women for the purpose of sex slavery has always been a field of activity of organised crime groups, at the latest since the opening of the borders to the East. And Germany virtually invites these much-described and rightly feared OC groups through its central geographical location, its economic conditions, its high demand for illegal goods (including the victims of this market) and not least through its persistently offender-friendly (legal) conditions. And these groups have been accepting the invitation gratefully and in large measure for years.

Even before the trade in weapons and drugs, the trade in women as a commodity is the most lucrative source of income for organised crime. Weapons and drugs can only be sold once, but women can be sold again and again.

Background on Danube activities in connection with the conference

Already in autumn 2017, during the annual forum of the EU Danube Strategy in Budapest, Ulm and Neu-Ulm had spoken out against human trafficking and forced prostitution in a declaration of cities and regions along the Danube formulated by the Danube Office and the Ulm Alliance. Human trafficking and especially the trafficking of women and children along the Danube for the purpose of sexual exploitation is a real problem and not compatible with basic European values.

For this reason, the Danube Office as project promoter, together with the Ulm Alliance, the City of Ulm, Solwodi Baden-Württemberg and the Ulm Police Headquarters, has now set out to implement a specialist conference on the topic of "Ways out of human trafficking and sexual exploitation in the Danube region". With this conference, we hope for further important impulses to jointly fight human trafficking and for strong networks across state and sector borders that radiate into the entire Danube region.

Origin of the idea for the 2018 conference - Minister of State Theresa SchopperThe Ulm Alliance against Human Trafficking and Forced Prostitution has been addressing the issue of human trafficking and forced prostitution for many years. After a very successful event organised by the Ulm Alliance at the Donaufest 2018, the then State Secretary and now Minister of Culture of Baden-Württemberg, Theresa Schopper, contacted the Ulm Alliance.

Together with the Ulm Police Headquarters, the Ulm Alliance against Human Trafficking and Forced Prostitution drew up a concept for the international conference "Ways out of Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation in the Danube Region" and submitted an application for funding to the State Ministry.

The Ministry of State supports the conference financially in the course of implementing the EU Strategy for the Danube Region. The Danube Office is the project management agency. Originally, the conference was planned for autumn 2020 on site in Ulm.

With the request for reporting.

Please see the next page.

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