



## **Report of the Third Pilot Training**

*of the EU ISEC project on Joint Efforts of Police and Health Authorities in the EU Member States and Third Countries to Combat and Prevent Trafficking in Human Beings and Protect and Assist Victims of Trafficking*

**Tirana, Albania**

**April 15/16, 2013**

### **Preliminary remarks on the organisation of the meeting**

The Third in a sequence of four Pilot Trainings foreseen by the project, The Tirana Pilot Training took place in the premises of the Albanian Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. It was aimed at gathering knowledge of the Albanian institutional and administrative structures against trafficking in human beings and in particular The State Committee for the Fight against Trafficking in Human Beings which implements the policy of the government against THB. This committee is chaired by the Ministry of Interior and is composed of members from different Ministries, including the Ministry of Health which is of the particular interest for this project.

However, the forthcoming elections uncertainty and the ensuing instability caused by the competition of political parties (the national elections in Albania will take place in June 2013) has unfortunately strongly impacted the ISEC project meeting proceedings and results.

The meeting was organised jointly by Payoke, the Albanian Mediterranean University and the Albanian Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. The Payoke mission to Albania in June 2012 was precisely aimed at solidifying the commitment of Albanian partners and ensuring that the participation of Albanian stakeholders to the Pilot training meets the requirements of the project. The Hague ISEC project expert meeting of June 2012 and the additional contacts undertaken with the Permanent representation of Albania to the EU in Brussels brought additional guarantees that the



Pilot training in Albania would be a success . Moreover, the mail sent by the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities a few days prior to the event has confirmed that the preliminary list of participants included the director level representatives from different Ministries as well as their colleagues. The reality was unfortunately very different. Apparently our partners were suddenly not allowed to act as agreed and visible obstruction took place. The latter to the contrary of the assurances given during the past 12 months by the Ambassador, by all ministries and partners involved.

Not only the premises address provided by the host of the meeting was wrong, and hence caused a delay in finding the venue, but the participants also showed up in small numbers. Those who actually attended were invited by the Payoke and not through the Ministry of Labour. In spite of the aforementioned mishap the bill charged by the Ministry for the organisation and the logistic of the event was hugely excessive, which after negotiations was reduced to a sum still too high for the services delivered.

In spite of the repeated invitations to the EU Delegation in Tirana to attend they never replied or answered the phone.

## **The proceedings of the meeting**

The meeting was however in many ways useful for and relevant to the project, as it provided a hint of the state of play of the Albanian anti-trafficking action and further clarified a few issues related to the police/health cooperation in the field of anti-trafficking .

This report provides a snap shot of the overall impression of the Albanian efforts to counter trafficking while summarizing the most salient issues raised during the discussion among project experts, representatives of Albanian NGOs and a few representatives from the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities who attended the meeting.

On paper, the Albanian laws and institutions aimed at countering trafficking in human beings and catering for the needs of victims provide a model example for the rest of Europe. Albania has not only ratified all major international and European conventions against THB but is endowed with a complex system of institutional mechanisms matching fully the EU requirements for a comprehensive and holistic policy approach against trafficking in human beings. The involvement and participation of a number of



ministries in the National Referral Mechanism, the appointment of THB Focal points in all respective Ministries, the institution of the National Anti-trafficking coordinator, the SOP's and as well as the establishment of the First Instance Court dealing with serious crimes, including trafficking, have considerably strengthened the capacity of Albania to tackle trafficking as a form of organised crime. However, there are some reasons to believe that in spite of the legal and institutional mechanism that deserves all praise there are still gaps and demeanours that need to be addressed.

During the ISEC project meeting an NGO has reported about cases which revealed violations of human rights and negligence from the police and other anti-trafficking actors. One case concerned a Roma victim, which triggered discussion about the respect and protection of minorities in Albania (mostly represented are the Roma and Egyptian minority). Denied by the police representatives these allegations remain difficult to prove, leaving however a lingering feeling that there are still gaps to be closed and efforts to be made in order to make fully operative the available mechanisms against trafficking.

On the positive side, there is a noticeable commitment from NGOs to provide conditions for rehabilitation, return and reintegration of trafficked victims. It consists of legal advice, professional training and accommodation for victims in order to help them start up a new life. There are 36 employment offices in the country that register job seekers. The professional training provided for the VOTs is free of charge and is aimed at building their skills in different professions such as tailoring, hair dressing but also language and computer use. Part of it is also the cooperation with medical doctors, whereby doctors carry out a complete medical check-up of victims upon their return and provide medical advice and therapy for identified medical conditions. As victims' statements are often confused and incoherent, the medical assistance plays an important role for prosecution. Assistance and care are available to all victims, independently of their decision to cooperate with the law enforcement authorities. To avoid questions of confidentiality, victims are sometimes referred to private clinics for assistance and treatment. It is for this reason that the cooperation between some NGOs and private clinics is far better than with the public ones. But the referral never comes from doctors, even though they do gather the information that can significantly help victims identification. A number of projects consisted of training of the Albanian officials from different ministries and NGOs has been carried out by various international organisations working in Albania. Still lacking is the training of medical doctors and other health professionals. It was reported that the representatives of the Ministry of Health received training on THB, but this information needs to be verified.



In terms of procedure, the victim is first referred to the police station to be identified and is then transferred to the shelter. It was reported that the police does not have its own psychological unit and often fails to contact the NGOs who work with the medical professionals. With the exception of medical doctors working in the shelter, health professionals are not enough aware of trafficking. The cases of trafficking are referred to by NGOs and police but never by a medical doctor. This gives a lot of weight to the ISEC project efforts.

The Ministry of Education plays an important role in the process of victims integration, especially with reference to the marginalised groups such as the Roma and Egyptians. Focal points are nominated within the ministry to enable victims' education and provide vocational training thus increasing the chances in the labour market.

The Payoke Director underlined the importance of the new EU Directive against trafficking to which Albania should comply as part of the body of law to be incorporated into the Albanian legislation upon future accession to the EU. Even though the Albanian legislation is very advanced, the problem of early identification of victims remains a big challenge.

The expert from the University of Antwerp presented the situation in Belgium regarding challenges of the medical professionals to actively participate in fight against trafficking in human beings. The issue of confidentiality was given particular attention. Even though the Belgian medical doctors do not share information with the police there is an exception to it in cases of HIV, child abuse and domestic violence. Particularly challenging is the fact that doctors usually do not make a link between the injury/trauma and trafficking. It is therefore important to raise awareness of medical doctors, discuss further the issue of confidentiality, provide training for the medical profession and establish Focal points in hospitals following the example of Albania.

The meeting was concluded by a statement from the representative of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities which highlighted the importance of the ISEC project and praised the European Union's efforts to help Albania on its path towards democracy.