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## Legalizing lies

The Interior Ministry is deluded if it expects legalized prostitution to bring in tens of millions of dollars in tax revenue

By Donna M. Hughes  
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In the Czech Republic during the last decade, the sex trade has gone from being almost nonexistent to a \$100 million (2.7 billion Kc) money making industry -- for organized-crime networks and collaborating corrupt officials. The women and children who are used for the sex acts get to keep little of the money; in fact, most of them are slaves, victims of sex trafficking.

There are more than 860 brothels in the Czech Republic, 200 of them in Prague, according to a study by the Interior Ministry. The government recognizes that it has a serious problem. And the deputy mayor of Prague, Rudolf Blazek, even told a reporter that with the spread of brothels, peep shows and prostitution, "Prague is starting to resemble Amsterdam."

Contrary to that observation, the Czech government is proposing a Dutch solution to the problem: legalization of prostitution.

The ministry, which is preparing the bill, believes it is possible to separate prostitution from crime, register prostitutes, impose health regulations and collect taxes. And in the process, supposedly, the involvement of organized-crime groups in the trade will be eliminated and the trafficking of women and children will decrease.

That is wishful thinking.

Prostitution has been legalized without these positive expected outcomes in Australia, the Netherlands and Germany. Although legalization has resulted in big legal profits for a few, the other benefits have not materialized. Organized-crime groups continue to traffic in women and children and run illegal prostitution operations alongside the legal businesses. In Victoria, Australia, legalization of brothels was supposed to eliminate street prostitution. It did not; in fact, last year there were calls for legalizing street prostitution in order to "control" it. Legalization does not reduce prostitution or trafficking; in fact, both activities increase because men can legally buy sex acts, and pimps and brothel-keepers can legally sell and profit from them. Cities develop reputations as sex-tourist destinations.

When prostitution is illegal but thriving, government officials often look covetously at all that money being made by criminals -- some say more than \$200 million in the Czech Republic -- and jealously think they are not getting their share. The Interior Ministry estimates that the state and municipalities will earn tens of millions of dollars in tax revenue after legalization of prostitution. Officials can keep on dreaming.

German lawmakers thought they were going to get hundreds of millions of euros in tax revenue when they legalized prostitution and brothels in 2002. But in keeping with the criminal nature of prostitution, the newly redefined "business owners" and "freelance staff" in brothels will not pay up. The German Federal Audit Office estimates the government has lost more than 2 billion euros (64 billion Kc/\$2.4 billion) a year in unpaid tax revenue from the sex industry, and lawmakers there recently began looking for ways to increase collection of taxes from prostitutes. Disgustingly, the German government expects to solve its economic problems, at least in part, off the backs of some of the most abused and exploited women in the world.

This predatory behavior sharply contrasts with the promised benefits of legalization in Germany, such as government benefits and rights for women. Legalization was supposed to enable women to get health insurance and retirement benefits and to enable them to join unions.

The normalization of prostitution as work has not occurred in Germany, the Netherlands or Australia, nor will it occur in the Czech Republic. Following legalization, few women have signed up for benefits or unions. Prostitution is not work; it is not a job like any other. It is abuse and exploitation that women only engage in if forced to or when they have no other options. Even where prostitution is legal, a significant proportion of women are trafficked. Women and children controlled by mafias and criminals cannot register with an authority or join a union. Women who are making a more or less free choice to be in prostitution do so out of immediate necessity -- debt, unemployment and poverty. They seldom tell friends or relatives what they are doing to earn money. They do not want to register with authorities and create a permanent record of being a prostitute. And unionization of "sex workers" is a leftist fantasy; it is completely incompatible with the coercive and abusive nature of prostitution.

The legalization of prostitution in the Czech Republic is particularly dangerous because of its central geographic location between Eastern and Western Europe and its membership in the European Union. The Czech Republic is already a transit country for the trafficking of victims from Eastern to Western Europe. Legalization will open up a gateway for the flow of women from poorer countries to the east into all of Europe.

In the Czech Republic, women have not had an effective voice to protest the move to legalize prostitution. There are no civil-society organizations effectively speaking out against the harm of legalization to women, families and communities. In many countries, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) protest attempts to subvert women's rights and the well-being of all of society by making such abuse and exploitation legal. In the Czech Republic, the best-known antitrafficking organization, La Strada-Czech Republic, is a member of a Dutch-founded network of antitrafficking NGOs. Consequently, this NGO speaks in a Dutch voice and supports its funder's view that prostitution can be work for women. It supports legalization of prostitution. Effectively, the women have been abandoned to the pimps and the sex tourists.

Recently a broad spectrum of international human rights activists came together to urge the Czech government to halt the legalization of prostitution. The group represents an amazing breadth of political and philosophical positions, ranging from feminist to liberal to conservative, from secular to faith-based and U.S.-based policy organizations. It also includes antitrafficking organizations for victims of trafficking in source countries such as Russia, Georgia and Tajikistan, and groups from such diverse corners of the world as India, Israel, France, Thailand, Canada, Ireland and New Zealand. What they have in common is their knowledge that prostitution is harmful and their commitment to abolishing this form of sexual exploitation worldwide.

Some 120 signatories for organizations representing millions of members recently sent a letter to Czech President Vaclav Klaus and government officials urging them to reconsider the plan to legalize prostitution. The letter made clear that a decision to accommodate traffickers, pimps and organized crime's slave trade in girls and women is an act unworthy of Czechs' tradition of fighting for their own freedom. "It is an act we will resist with every democratic means available to us, and will fight in Congress and our legislatures, through our organized women's movements and from tens of thousands of church and synagogue pulpits. At a minimum, we are determined that our efforts will in financial terms alone be more costly to the republic -- and not in terms of tourism alone -- than any hypothetical financial gains claimed." (See the *National Review's* Web site, [www.nationalreview.com](http://www.nationalreview.com), to view the letter.)

The signers of the letter pointed out that the decision by the Czech Republic will affect all of Europe. The redefinition of prostitution as a form of work for women deeply threatens the rights and status of women everywhere. Other European countries have already legalized the sale of women's bodies, with none of the social and economic benefits it was supposed to bring. There is no reason to believe legalization will be any more successful in the Czech Republic.

The Czech government would be wise to get tough against crime and corruption instead of selling out women and children.

-- *The writer is a professor and Carlson Endowed Chair in Women's Studies at the University of Rhode Island.*

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