

## Donna M. Hughes

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### Turn and Look

Shining a spotlight on Germany's shame.

By Donna M. Hughes

**T**wo Russian women, Masha and Irina, have come forward to tell their stories of being trafficked into prostitution in Germany.

Both women are educated professionals: Masha is a lawyer; Irina is an engineer and an accountant. Both left Russia for Germany with the promise of employment as either a housekeeper or waitress. Masha was seeking an opportunity to see the world and learn a new language; Irina was in debt and wanted a better paying job.

Their stories are typical trafficking stories: When they arrived in Germany, they were met by members of the Russian mafia; their passports were taken away; and they were informed that the jobs they expected didn't exist and they would be prostitutes instead. They were told it was futile to resist and that the police would not help them because the pimps worked under police protection.

Irina resisted and was beaten. She was shown photographs of dead, mutilated women who tried to go to the police. The mafia had locations where thugs beat and sometimes killed uncooperative women. Irina fearfully decided to cooperate and earn enough money to pay off the debt the Russian mafia claimed she owed. Masha also decided to be compliant, going so far as to feign disappointment when a man chose another woman for sex, while she waited for an opportunity to escape.

The pimps sent Masha and three other Russian women to a bar called "Savoy" near Bielefeld, Germany. They learned they were replacements for Russian women who had been murdered there. When they arrived they found the clothes, underwear, and purses of the murdered women.

Masha was trafficked to Germany before prostitution was legalized in 2002, and police were still carrying out raids. Masha was twice arrested in police raids. But instead of being rescued and provided with services, the police released her onto the street with no money and no references for shelters or services. The first time, she and the other women naively returned to the bar to pick-up their belongings. The Russian mafia was immediately tipped off about their return. They were recaptured and Masha was sold to another pimp. The second club was raided and again she was detained by police. And once again, she was released with no assistance, shelter, or information. She ended up back under the control of a pimp.

German police had two opportunities to identify Masha as a victim of trafficking and failed both times. Since the legalization of prostitution, police have fewer reasons to investigate brothels, and victims have fewer opportunities to receive assistance.

After being sold twice, Masha's mental health deteriorated. She stopped eating and threatened to commit suicide by jumping from a fourth-floor window. The pimp, fearing that such an incident would draw attention to his operation, and probably realizing that her usefulness to him was over, sent her back to Russia.

Irina was trafficked to Germany after prostitution was legalized, and she was placed in a legal brothel in Bremen. Irina said that women in the legal brothel were trafficked and did not have access to their documents — either the original ones or the fake ones the mafia charged them for. The pimps regularly reminded the women that they knew where their families lived and would kill their children if they tried to escape.

In the club where Irina was held, she observed women being sold to different pimps destined for Belgium and the Netherlands, where prostitution is legal. Eventually, she was sent to a club called "Diplomat" in the Netherlands. While there she observed the pimps working with the Russian mafia regularly to supply women to the brothels. During the move, 2,000 euros were added to her debt for a fake Lithuanian passport. She said, "I saw right away that no matter how many men there were, I could never repay the debts."

Irina decided to escape. Another Russian woman, Tatiana, who was being held captive by threat of harm to her two-year-old son back in Russia, helped her by stealing her fake passport from the pimps. Irina fled. She later learned that Tatiana was murdered for helping her escape.

Irina was assisted by local people, but the Russian mafia continued to track her, threatening to kill her. She was moved from place to place, and worked as a hostess and waitress, but no longer forced into prostitution. After hiding in a garage for two weeks, she decided to go to the police. At the Dutch police station, she was immediately arrested for having a false passport. Although she gave the Dutch police all the information she had about the Russian traffickers, they continued to treat her as the criminal. Over the course of two years, she moved from a jail, to a shelter, back to prison for failure to pay the fine for having a fake passport. In frustration, she went on a hunger strike in prison. They put her in solitary confinement with only a mattress on the floor. They never arrested the traffickers or pimps.

Finally, Irina's daughter contacted the [Angel Coalition](#), an anti-trafficking coalition and service provider in Russia, which assisted her in getting out of prison. The police released her and refused to help her get to the Russian consulate.

On June 14, Masha and Irina testified about their experiences being trafficked to Germany before the U.S. House International Relations Committee. While the women were testifying a representative from the German embassy distributed a statement to the press defending their efforts to combat trafficking.

Irina concluded, "I did not commit any crime in those countries and I was put in prison [in the Netherlands] for absolutely nothing. The people who involved me in that situation are still free and continue to traffic women under government cover." Irina returned to Russia several months ago and is still trying to cope with the terrible things she went through in Germany and the Netherlands.

Masha summed up her experience by saying, "It seem like we Russian women are placed in

impossible economic conditions and are not needed by our own country. In other countries, we are spit on as prostitutes when we are really victims. Ten years have passed since I was trafficked, but the situation has still not changed. Is the German government really not aware of what is happening in their country? Or are they happy to profit from our suffering?"

Germany's legal sex industry is estimated to make \$18 billion annually. Little of this money goes to the mostly foreign women who are exploited by the pimps and city governments. The government acknowledges that there are 400,000 women in prostitution in Germany. The German Women's Council estimated that an additional 40,000 women would be brought into Germany to "service" the male fans attending the World Cup. Although the exact number is impossible to know, a ten-percent increase is not an unreasonable estimate.

Following international outrage over city-government involvement in setting up brothels and accommodating the pimps for the World Cup games, the German police claim they are carrying out checks of documents in brothels, but are not finding an increase in trafficking.

Yet, at the end of May, police in Latvia arrested a man suspected of selling women to German brothels. Six women were sent to five different brothels. The trafficker was paying \$130 for each woman delivered to him. He then received \$520 for each woman from the German brothel. They were recruiting women among known prostitutes, which makes it harder to prove they are victims of trafficking, because people often claim "they knew what they were getting into."

And now that the World Cup games are underway, Solowodi, the Catholic charity in Berlin, says they have already received calls from victims, and clinics are putting them in touch with trafficked victims.

The spotlight is on Germany and its policy of "sex work." Over the next few weeks and months, we will learn more about what happens to women in the prostitution industry there. I predict that the 2006 World Cup in Germany will be a turning point for the global abolitionist movement, as people, including those who truly thought that legalization was better for women, are faced with the degrading monster they have created.

—*Donna M. Hughes is a professor & Carlson Endowed Chair at the University of Rhode Island.*

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National Review Online - <http://article.nationalreview.com/?q=ODk1YTEwNzM0OTY3YjgwZDk3NTJlYWw5YTNlZGIxYmM=>