

3. PROSTITUTION AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING

In the past 5-6 years, prostitution has become **a much debated issue in Bulgaria for two notable reasons**. First, owing to the connection between paid sex services and organized crime, and secondly, because of the association of prostitution with human trafficking and sexual exploitation, which has attracted the attention both of large international organizations and of western governments.

The young women victims of sexual exploitation who have sought help in Western Europe provided the first indications of **the scope of the problem of Bulgarian prostitution**. The data from countries such as Germany and the Netherlands have been particularly important in this process – their publicly accessible and systematic approach has helped reveal that a small country has become one of the largest suppliers in the human trafficking industry. According to the four annual reports of the Dutch National Rapporteur, between 2000 and 2003, 14% of these victims in the Netherlands came from Bulgaria, making it the most common country of origin for the period monitored.

The fact that Holland does not represent some kind of anomaly in the forcible supply of human flesh finds confirmation in the largest sexual services market in Europe – Germany. According to the annual analyses of Bundeskriminalamt for the period 2001-2005, Bulgaria ranks third worldwide by number of female victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation (see *Table 6*).

The cases of trafficking for sexual exploitation purposes periodically registered in Austria, Greece, Italy, Belgium and Spain in particular, suggest the conclusion that this extremely grave crime against the person is similar in scope to that recorded in Germany and the Netherlands, but the information is regrettably not systematized.

The data from Germany or the Netherlands concerning sexual trafficking raise one major issue: **what makes it possible for an 8-million country to account for trafficking comparable in absolute terms** with that originating from Russia and its 150-million population, Thailand with 65 million, Ukraine with 46 million, as well as to surpass countries having three to five times its population, such as Poland and Romania.

It was the initial goal of the present analysis to explore the typology and organization of the prostitution market in Bulgaria; however, the research on trafficking in women in Western Europe found shocking statistics about the extent to which the country is represented in view of its demographic profile (see the victim coefficient in *Table 6*).

Table 5. Victims of sexual exploitation in the Netherlands by country of origin

	2000–2003	
	Number of victims	Percentage of the victims
Bulgaria	166	14 %
Nigeria	122	10 %
Romania	67	6 %
Russia	73	6 %
Netherlands	65	5 %
China	45	4 %
Ukraine	49	4 %
Czech Republic	31	3 %
Lithuania	42	3 %
Sierra Leone	39	3 %
Albania	19	2 %
Cameroon	21	2 %
Moldova	30	2 %
Poland	28	2 %
Brazil	13	1 %
Guinea	15	1 %
Thailand	12	1 %
Unknown	161	13 %
Other	227	19 %
Total	1,225	100 %

Source: *Trafficking in Human Beings – Dutch National Rapporteur*

In this context, several important questions emerged: first of all, **what is the scope of the Bulgarian export of prostitutes for Western Europe?** As indicated by the analyses, 90% of the victims are trafficked for sexual exploitation purposes. At the same time, studies on prostitution in Western Europe show that only a tiny proportion of the women engaged in prostitution in foreign countries have sought help and have thus been registered as trafficking victims. Consequently, the records of the number of victims of Bulgarian origin may be viewed as the tip of the iceberg beneath which there are actually huge numbers of women engaged in prostitution outside Bulgaria. Secondly, **what might be the reason for this important Bulgarian presence among prostitutes in Western Europe?** And thirdly, whether this high Bulgarian representation among trafficking victims is the outcome solely of **socio-economic factors** or can be accounted for by the **specifics of crime in this country**.

Table 6. Trafficking victims by country of origin, 2001–2005

	Number of victims in the period 2001–2005	Victim Coefficient for 2003*
Russia	747	1.2
Ukraine	520	1.6
Bulgaria	432	12.7
Romania	425	4.3

* The coefficient is calculated for women in the 15–30 age group per 100,000 persons for the respective country

Source: Bundeskriminalamt, 2002–2005

The problems raised are only part of the complex socio-economic phenomenon of Bulgarian prostitution. Undoubtedly, the “export” of girls offering sexual services in Western and Central Europe is the most profitable market for Bulgarian prostitution but it would not be possible without the domestic prostitution market. That is why it is the object of the present study to tentatively reconstruct the emergence of the Bulgarian paid sex market, as well as to examine the structure and organization of prostitution in this country. Being one of the first attempts to analyze the problem of prostitution¹³⁹ in Bulgaria, the present chapter makes no pretence at exhaustiveness.

¹³⁹ Different types of theoretical analyses have tried to account for the spread of prostitution in a society. The studies on the topic can generally be resumed to four basic approaches to explaining women’s involvement in prostitution: *pathological model*, *model of social disorganization and criminal subculture*, *model of the economic situation and poverty*, and *model of male violence*.

The logic of the *pathological model* is that it is some kind of inherent individual anomaly or pathology that drives a woman to engage in prostitution. Its advocates view prostitutes as being completely different from “ordinary” women.

The *social disorganization and criminal subculture model* focuses on the woman’s relationships and position in her broader environment to account for her involvement in prostitution. What matters is the extent to which a woman is likely to fail in what is perceived as normal and in her professional and family relationships. Women engaged in prostitution are viewed as violating the established normative system, which makes their involvement in prostitution practically inevitable.

The *economic position model* highlights the specific economic conditions conducive to involvement in prostitution. It is viewed as an economically motivated decision since prostitution is assumed to be an economic activity. This approach generally takes two forms: 1. women are forced and/or choose to take up prostitution because the lack any other means of making a living; 2. women choose to engage in prostitution because they can earn far more money through it than by any of the other economic options available to them.

The *sex discrimination and male violence model* assumes there is a difference between prostitutes and other women and that it stems from the effect of prostitution on women. Proponents of this model also account for prostitution as the outcome of male control over female sexuality. Women become prostitutes because of earlier abuse by men. Prostitutes are perceived as ‘victims’ of the male domination system in which they are women with little or no resources to oppose the powers that be.

3.1. THE EMERGENCE OF THE DOMESTIC MARKET AND THE BALKAN CONTEXT

Following the collapse of the communist regime, the countries of Eastern and Central Europe underwent complex political, economic, and social changes. The cataclysms associated with the economic transition led to mounting unemployment and a drastic drop in the standard of living.

Some specialized studies¹⁴⁰ note as one of the consequences of these changes the fact that for a large number of women prostitution has become the only means to earn a living for themselves and their families and that almost all of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, and most notably the Balkan states, have registered a dramatic increase in the number of prostitutes.

The armed conflicts in the countries of former Yugoslavia have been another factor conducive to the growth of the prostitution business in the Balkans. The poorly guarded borders, the presence of international troops, as well as the lack of a working judicial system create the perfect conditions for a flourishing sex industry in the countries of this region. A large number of prostitutes stay in the vicinity of the military bases to offer sexual services to the soldiers. Since in most countries in the Balkan Peninsula prostitution is prohibited by law, it is becoming not only a serious social problem for the region,¹⁴¹ but also an important source of income for organized crime.

What is happening in Bulgaria is in many respects preconditioned by the **Balkan context** and the considerably more severe **economic upheavals** compared to central Eastern Europe. Nevertheless, the sexual services market developed at a relatively slow pace. Although almost immediately after 1990 the police stopped implementing repressive measures against women offering sexual services, it would take another 7-8 years for prostitution to become a mass occupation.

Unfortunately, there are practically no studies explaining the reasons for either the delayed development or the dramatic surge in prostitution in the late 1990s. Interviews with police officers, prostitutes, pimps, club owners, and investigative journalistic reports point to several interrelated factors accounting for the slower expansion of prostitution – from the socialist heritage and the strong family and kinship ties to the extremely reduced incomes, which in turn limited the domestic demand.

A tentative reconstruction of the emergence of the domestic market for paid sexual services quite revealingly shows that in the early 1990s, the places needing such services, e.g. hotels and night clubs, actually imported prostitutes from Ukraine, Moldova, and Russia. In the early years of the transition, most of the recruits were socially disadvantaged girls (of Roma origin, coming from small settlements, etc.) and girls with deviant behavior who were retained in the in-

¹⁴⁰ See for ex., Sarang, A. and I. Hoover (eds.) 2005. *Sex work, HIV/AIDS, and Human rights in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia*. The Central and Eastern Europe Harm Reduction Network, p. 19.

¹⁴¹ Ibidem.

dustry largely by systematic violence. In fact, in Bulgaria, prostitution without the involvement of procurer networks or of club owners is practically impossible. At the same time, at all levels of the paid sex market (from street prostitution to beauty pageants), which had already been structured by 1992-93, it is possible to detect the involvement and control by organized crime.

The slow development of the Bulgarian domestic market, however, does not prevent it from linking up with the international procurer networks. The emigration wave of 1989-91; Bulgarian repeat criminals pardoned in 1990 and settling down in Central Europe; the war in Former Yugoslavia in the summer of 1991, and the breakdown of the USSR were only some of **the factors that helped 'lock together' the emerging Bulgarian market for sexual services with that of Central and Western Europe.** It became common practice for Bulgarian prostitutes to be supplied by Balkan and East-European procurers, with the Albanian pimp networks predominating initially. Here violence is omnipresent, both in the process of recruiting girls, typically by abduction, and in controlling the prostitutes, with physical punishment being the standard procedure in case of failure to fulfill the daily norm. **What is most characteristic of Bulgarian prostitution, however, is the influence of Russian-speaking organized crime.** The model of fixed locations and preliminary distribution of the places reserved for each pimp and his girls has been adopted by Bulgarian procurers, as well. The latter prefer the term "post" rather than the Russian "tochka", but it has exactly the same structural and organizational role – market distribution. Depending on the profitability of the area and the number of posts, the pimp pays his dues to the bosses of organized crime and to the law-enforcement authorities (typically police and prosecutor's office) and the administration.

As the violent entrepreneurs flourished during the Yugoslav embargo (see Chapter II), the cooperation with organized crime structures in the Western Balkans and Central Europe in the trafficking of girls for prostitution became stable and developed along the same lines as the other operations involving the crossing of Balkan borders – trafficking of oil products, drugs, stolen goods, etc. In turn, this in many respects created similar conditions in the sex services market.

In the first half of the 1990s the export of prostitutes underwent serious evolution and repeatedly changed its channels before turning into a sustainable activity. **Historically, Hungary and the Czech Republic were the first destinations for export of prostitutes** and respectively, where the first Bulgarian procurer networks were formed. The proximity and easier access to these former socialist countries made them a preferred destination and the Bulgarian procurers made use of the base put in place by Bulgarian car thieves. In the former CMEA (the communist trade bloc) countries, Bulgarian prostitutes worked mostly in locations close to the borders with Germany and Austria, where sex tourism was most active. Whereas in the early 1990s, access to Western Europe was sporadic owing to visa limitations, by 1993-94, the first groups of pimps and prostitutes had settled in more liberal countries like **the Netherlands and Belgium** and there began the process of expansion of the Bulgarian communities. The third destination was to **Greece and Macedonia**, whence the route continued to **Italy**. The fourth destination for export of Bulgarian girls was to countries of former Yugoslavia in the areas

where peacekeeping forces were stationed – initially **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, and subsequently, **Kosovo**.

By the mid 1990s, the structure of the Bulgarian prostitution market had taken shape. There appeared three strata – **street, night club, and elite prostitution**. These three levels in turn yielded two other forms of Bulgarian prostitution – **resort and export prostitution**.

Box 3. Legalizing prostitution: pros and cons

The legalization of prostitution has been widely debated in the specialized literature and in public discourse.¹⁴² There are essentially two opposed views – that it should be criminalized and that it should be legalized – with each side putting forth arguments in support of their position.

The advocates of criminalization generally have three types of arguments. One is based on traditional and religious morality – prostitution is regarded as a sin and symbol of social depravity completely at odds with the moral values that should be upheld. The second line of reasoning emphasizes that prostitution is conducive to crime and disease. Finally, many feminists argue that prostitution leads to degradation and subordination of women.

Those in favor of legalizing it claim this may even be a social good. The freedom to dispose of one's own body is believed to be a fundamental human right. Two main arguments are put forward in this context: of a financial and medical nature. The former highlights the revenues that prostitution stands to bring to the national budget of a given country in the form of taxes. In the second case, it is argued that making prostitution legal would help improve the health and physical condition of prostitutes through mandatory medical checks and tests for HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. The advocates of legalization further point out that this would allow the state to regulate the number of prostitutes and designate licensed locations where they would be able to offer their services.

Depending on the socio-economic history, cultural values and institutional development, the various states have implemented very different legislative solutions. These can generally be reduced to three basic models: prostitution is banned; prostitution is allowed; there lack straightforward regulations. Bulgaria clearly falls within the group of countries that have chosen the absence of a clear-cut legal framework. Or rather, the sex industry has adjusted efficiently to the fragments of legislation remaining from socialist times and those created in the chaos of the transition period.

¹⁴² See for ex., Liberator, M. 2004. *Legalized Prostitution: Regulating the Oldest Profession*. < <<http://www.liberator.net/articles/prostitution.html>> >: Phoenix, I. 1999. *Making Sense of Prostitution*. London: Antony Rowe Ltd; Katval, N. K. 1993. "Men Who Own Women: A Thirteenth Amendment Critique of Forced Prostitution" *Yale Law Journal* 103: 791-826.

Box 4. Prostitution in Bulgarian legislation

In the Bulgarian Penal Code prostitution-related crimes are covered in Chapter II of its special part on crimes against the person, section VIII, 'Debauchery' (mainly in Art. 155, Art. 156 et seq.), as well as in Section IX, 'Human Trafficking'.

Article 155 incriminates the act of inciting a person to engage in prostitution, procurement, and the provision of premises for sexual intercourse or fornication. In the first two cases, the penalty provided for is up to three years imprisonment and a fine of 1,000 to 3,000 leva, and in the latter case, a term of imprisonment of up to five years and a fine of 1,000 to 5,000 leva. When such acts were committed for profit the penalties are harsher – 1 to 6 years imprisonment and a fine of 5,000 to 15,000 leva. The law provides for 5 to 15 years of imprisonment and a fine of 10,000 to 50,000 leva for inciting or forcing another to use narcotic substances for prostitution purposes. The punishment is even more severe (10 to 20 years of imprisonment and a fine of 100,000 to 300,000 leva) when the act was committed:

1. by a person acting on behalf of an organized criminal group;
2. against a minor or mentally irresponsible person;
3. against two and more persons;
4. repeatedly.

The above provisions evidently do not concern the prostitutes but the procurers.

Article 156 incriminates abduction for the purpose of debauchery. This act is punished by imprisonment for a term of 3 to 10 years and a fine of up to 1000 leva. More severe penalties (5 to 15 years of imprisonment) are provided for when:

1. the kidnapped person is under the age of 18;
2. the kidnapped person was subjected to debauchery;
3. the abduction was carried with intent of debauchery outside the country;
4. the act was committed by a person acting on behalf of an organized criminal group;
5. the kidnapped person was subjected to debauchery outside the country;
6. the act was a dangerous repeat offense.

In the latter three cases, the law provides for a fine of 5,000 to 20,000 leva in addition to imprisonment.

Article 159a incriminates human trafficking (recruiting, transporting, concealing or harboring individuals or groups of individuals) for the purpose of prostitution. The act is a crime even if committed with the victim's consent and is punished by imprisonment of 1 to 8 years and a fine of up to 8,000 leva for domestic trafficking, and 3 to 8 years of imprisonment and a fine of up to 10,000 leva if the victims were taken across the border. More severe punishment (2 to 10 years of imprisonment and fine up to 10,000 leva for domestic trafficking; 5 to 10 years of imprisonment and fine of up to 15,000 for trans-border trafficking) is provided for if the crime was committed:

1. against a person who is under the age of 18;
2. by coercion or deceit;
3. by abduction or unlawful restraint;
4. by taking advantage of a state of dependency;
5. by abuse of power;
6. by promising, providing, or obtaining a gain.

Article 159b provides for a punishment of 5 to 15 years of imprisonment and fine of up to 20,000 leva when the trafficking was carried out by an organized criminal group or constituted a dangerous repeat offense and in addition the court may order confiscation of the whole or part of the perpetrator's property.

The Bulgarian Penal Code does not give a legal definition of the term 'prostitution' and does not provide for liability for the very provision of sexual services. Yet, even though the voluntary practice of prostitution by an adult is not prohibited in itself, it is not subject to explicit regulation in Bulgarian legislation and its admissibility is therefore not obvious.

Box 4. Prostitution in Bulgarian legislation (continued)

Furthermore, procurement, which is punishable, is hard to establish and prove, not least because the prostitutes themselves tend to cover up for their pimps, saying they are their boyfriends or husbands. Yet survey¹⁴³ data indicate that fewer than 5% of the prostitutes in this country are working without a procurer. This, together with the ambiguous legal framework, undermines the efficiency of investigative and court authorities, as evidenced by official data on convictions for procurement of prostitution.

According to National Statistical Institute data, in the past 5 years, charges of debauchery have been brought against 350-390 persons on average per year, of whom hardly more than 10-15 convicted of procurement of prostitution.

3.2. TYPOLOGY OF PROSTITUTION IN BULGARIA

The primary information used has been collected through in-depth interviews with representatives of the main groups involved or concerned with prostitution. On the one hand, these are the prostitutes themselves and their procurers, and on the other, police officers dealing with the problem.¹⁴⁴ The interviews conducted with representatives of NGOs concerned with prostitution-related problems and working with prostitutes in the field equally proved highly useful.

Based on these data, the following main types of prostitution will be considered: street and highway prostitution; club; and elite prostitution.

Street and Highway Prostitution

The data indicate remarkable similarities between street and highway prostitution which is why they will be considered together. Street and highway prostitutes only differ by the locations where they pick up clients, as well as by the specific occupations of their customers, mainly professional drivers in the case of highway prostitutes.

In terms of their social characteristics (reputation, practice, profits, clients, and level of protection), street and highway prostitutes **occupy the lowest levels in the stratification scale** of prostitution. At the same time, this is **the most conspicuous form** of prostitution which is why street and highway prostitutes most commonly get apprehended in police raids.

Street prostitutes are usually girls with low social status, mostly of Roma origin. They work in proximity to the train stations in the bigger towns (the central stations in Sofia, Plovdiv, and Bourgas are typical examples), the ring roads and the suburbs of the big urban centers, and in the towns and ports along the Black Sea coast. Highway prostitutes are typically found along the highways and the busv

¹⁴³ Arsova, T. *Prostitution and sex workers in Bulgaria: Analysis of the situation and the risk with regards to HIV/AIDS/STDs*. Health and Social Development Foundation, Sofia, 2000.

¹⁴⁴ The study has also drawn on interviews with representatives of the above-specified groups from the archive of the Center for the Study of Democracy, conducted by other teams, on different subjects and at different times but highly relevant to the issues at hand.

international roads in the territory of Bulgaria. They normally wait at parking lots, close to motels, roadside bars and restaurants, and places where drivers can easily pull off. In this case large truck drivers are the most common customers.

Official Mol data¹⁴⁵ indicate there are 366 gathering spots for prostitutes in Bulgaria, of which 109, along the highways across the country.

There are several ways of recruiting street and highway prostitutes. In some Roma families, there is a tradition to sell children to become prostitutes. All too often, the girls are resold from one procurer to another, with the price ranging from 500 to 1000 leva.

Unemployment and utter poverty, together with lack of education and skills also drive some women to take up this occupation of their own free will. According to some representatives of NGOs with field experience, quite a few of the prostitutes with whom they have had contacts had entered the profession voluntarily and even preferred it to "normal" work because it paid far better.

Another method of recruitment is by kidnapping young women. These are mostly girls from broken families, from orphanages, girls who are vulnerable and cannot expect any help from family and friends. Most exposed are the girls from small towns and villages whom the procurers lure with promises of well-paid jobs and housing in the city.

The price of the service offered by street and highway prostitutes is usually negotiated with the customer and is in the range of 5 to 30 leva depending on the location, the quality of the girl, and above all, on the type of service requested by the customer. On some international roads and in towns close to the border (e.g. Svilengrad and Sandanski), these prices are quoted in euro.

With this type of prostitution the procurers typically resort to **two kinds of control**. In one case, the procurer supervises the girls at all times. He waits nearby and watches them; thus he sees each customer and immediately after the session, the prostitute hands over the money earned. Most of the time, the procurer gets 70% of the takings and the prostitutes keep very little.

The other form of control is by setting a daily target amount that the prostitutes must earn or else bear sanctions, often involving the use of physical violence. The daily norm is usually 100 leva and the procurer only comes by a few times a day to check on the girls and collect the money they have made.

Street and highway prostitutes usually work in groups of 3-4 but sometimes as many as 10, and inside the cities there are some gathering spots where they can be even more numerous. The pimp makes sure no independent prostitutes turn up in his territory. In the event that they do, he immediately invites them to work for him. If the woman refuses he forces her by resorting to threats and violence. If she belongs to another procurer the matter is settled between the two of them. One procurer usually has 2 to 6 girls working for him and living with him.

¹⁴⁵ The data were announced before the National Assembly in late 2003 by Minister of Interior Georgi Petkanov and have repeatedly been cited in the media, see for ex., "Petkanov Counted 4611 Prostitutes", *Trud* daily, May 31, 2003.

It was established through the interviews that for a given procurer to work in a particular place he needs to pay the police officers in the respective area, as well as a representative of the criminal ring operating there. The prostitutes said that every day they allocated a certain amount, typically 20 leva, for a racketeer who was charging a fee for the particular location.

The information collected shows that although prostitutes are often apprehended by the police, in the absence of legal regulation of prostitution in Bulgaria, they rarely remain in detention for more than 24 hours, after which they go out in the streets again. Some of the respondents told of cases when police officers, in their efforts to cope with street and highway prostitution, actually charge the prostitutes with violation of traffic regulations.

What is particularly alarming in the case of street and highway prostitution is the fact that **some of the girls are very young, under 18 or 16**. Furthermore, street and highway prostitutes are highly exposed to high risk and often fall victim to crimes, both on the part of the procurers and the customers. **The victims rarely report the crimes to the police and do not seek legal protection.** The lack of any other sources of income, public ostracism, as well as the control exercised by the procurers makes it almost impossible for the women who have once become street or highway prostitutes to put an end to their involvement in this activity.

Club Prostitution

This form of prostitution is the most common one in Bulgaria on the middle level. It occupies the middle ground between street prostitution and the so-called elite prostitution.

With club prostitution the procurers take care of the logistical details – they establish contacts with the customers, provide premises, and watch out for police checks. They also make sure the girls in their clubs go through the necessary medical checkups.

Club prostitutes enjoy **greater security** than street and highway ones, both in terms of arrests and with respect to violence by customers and procurers. Few club prostitutes are resold by procurers as is common practice for street prostitutes and they are rarely made to work by force. Most engage in this activity out of financial interest. Often they even approach the procurers themselves in order to work in their clubs and to secure their protection and support. Unlike street prostitutes, those who work in clubs get days off and money for clothes and underwear. While street prostitutes are mostly from minority groups, **club prostitutes are of Bulgarian origin for the most part**, but there are some foreigners, too – mostly Russians and Ukrainians. The girls engaged in this type of prostitution are typically 18 to 30 years old.

The rates of club prostitutes range between 30 and 70 leva an hour, typically 50 leva, with the price usually increasing by 50% in case of nonstandard requests by the customers. Club prostitutes charge hourly as well as nightly rates, the latter in the range of 200-250 leva per night. The money is usually split 50:50 or 30:70 in favor of the procurer.

According to expert estimates, there are about 300 clubs in Bulgaria, about 100 of them in Sofia.¹⁴⁶ In the capital the highest concentration is found along the border of the first zone of the town's municipal division. It is believed that in the big cities in the country, there is an oligopoly model in club prostitution, with the capital, for example, divided among about a dozen owners.¹⁴⁷

The interviews conducted clearly showed that when speaking about club prostitution the different respondents actually had in mind **different types of prostitution**. They were generally referring to: **brothels; call girls; or clubs under the guise of bars and restaurants**. The information collected indicates that these three in fact coincide by all of their basic characteristics and in each case the prostitutes work for a club, which is why they will be considered as subtypes of club prostitution.

The interviews further revealed that the three types tend to intertwine and overlap. For example, many brothels also offer and deliver prostitutes to an address of the customer's choice as requested by phone.

Brothels

In a brothel there are usually 3-4 girls, a procurer and bodyguards. However, some brothels have 7-8 prostitutes. The procurers rent apartments and turn them into brothels, all while dealing with the promotion of the establishment, running ads in some papers, and in recent years, they have even been advertising their "goods" quite actively on the internet. Most clubs use ads not only to offer escort girls and prostitutes, but also to recruit them.

A large number of the apartments converted into brothels are located on the first floors of the buildings. Sometimes they operate under the cover of **massage parlors**. In this way, the brothels sidestepped the law, which as noted above, neither explicitly bans, nor allows, prostitution. The only official requirement is the payment of patent tax for escorts and masseurs. The respective tax rates are fixed in the Appendix to Chapter VII of the *Natural Person Income Tax Act*.¹⁴⁸ They depend on the category of the respective settlement.

For escorts, the due tax depends on the location:

Group I Sofia Municipality	Group II	Group III	Group IV, V	Group VI, VII, VIII
6,440	5,200	4,200	3,520	3,000

¹⁴⁶ See „I pay 15 grand a month to the Sofia Internal Affairs Directorate and nobody touches my brothels”, *Monitor* daily, April 21, 2007, ; an interview with a former official with the MoI Inspectorate Directorate revealed that the MoI has conducted various investigations of brothel owners for racketeering and prostitution.

¹⁴⁷ The opinion expressed by an anonymous owner cited in *Monitor* daily of April 21 was confirmed in part by police officers and girls working, or who have worked, in Sofia.

¹⁴⁸ Natural Person Income Tax Act (Promulgated State Gazette No 95/24.11.2006, effective as of 01.01.2007)

For masseurs, the due tax depends on the location:

Group I Sofia Municipality	Group II	Group III	Group IV, V	Group VI, VII, VIII
1.680	1.300	960	660	500

According to the *Natural Person Income Tax Act*, the revenue to the national budget from a single escort girl should range between 3,000 to 6,440 leva per year, depending on the type of settlement. Under the cover of massage parlors, however, they are liable for much lower patent tax rates and have to pay 500 to 1,680 leva.

Call girls

The clubs also take telephone orders for home services. It is usually the procurer who answers the phone or in his absence, one of the more experienced girls. The customer is told the price, conditions, and the available girls are described to him. The girl is delivered to the address by car either by the bodyguards of the club or by some trusted taxi driver working with the club and who waits until the session is over. As soon as the time paid for runs out, the prostitute leaves the address, and should the customer wish to prolong the session, she informs the bodyguards who wait close by. Extra payment is required for the taxi ride in addition to the prostitute's rate.

In addition to driving the girls and, when necessary, ensuring their protection while they are with customers, the taxi drivers are a link between customers and the clubs offering sex services. Should a client express an interest, most taxi drivers will recommend clubs with prostitutes and they usually have a deal with the procurer from the club to get a commission for each client they bring in, in the range of 5 to 10 leva.

Bars

Some prostitute clubs operate under the cover of bars and nightclubs, with the prostitutes officially presented as dancers or waitresses and the procurer acting as the manager. He informs the customers about the prices and conditions. They are usually offered a room for which in some places they have to pay about 20 leva extra. In some of the more luxurious establishments of this type, the prices exceed those for the other forms of club prostitution and can reach 100-200 leva.

The customer may choose to use the services of the prostitute outside the establishment or call and ask for one by phone, in which case the delivery takes place in the above described manner. There are usually about 10-15 girls in such establishments. Most of them are Bulgarian but there are also quite a few from the countries of the former USSR. The majority have taken up this occupation of their own will.

In the case of club prostitution, conflicts between the procurer and the prostitutes most typically arise because of non-compliance with the financial terms of the deal, usually when the procurer fails to pay the girls the percentage promised. Another reason for conflicts is the wish on the part of the prostitutes to leave the profession, in which case the procurer demands a forfeit, i.e. even if a woman initially started voluntarily she will find it hard to withdraw when she chooses.

In Bulgaria, a procurer rarely manages more than one club. He is connected to criminal organizations and pays them for working in their area and for their protection. These are usually criminal groups in charge of drug distribution, which additionally impose their control on the procurers and prostitutes. Insubordination by procurers is taken care of by the so-called "punitive brigades" at the disposal of these criminal rings.¹⁴⁹

Elite Prostitution

The scope and influence of elite prostitution could be the object of a special study. Here the topic is merely outlined in order to provide a better idea of the Bulgarian prostitution market.

Whereas street and highway prostitutes are regarded by the procurers as 'goods' and those in the brothels can be said to be "workers", the so-called elite prostitutes rank highest in the stratification scale and could even be considered entrepreneurs.

What is characteristic of this type of prostitution is that it seems to escape the attention of the police, the media, and the politicians which is due to the utmost discretion of the parties involved.¹⁵⁰ Therefore, the sources used to collect information about this type of prostitution were limited to former and current fashion models studying at higher education establishments in Bulgaria and Western Europe. On the one hand, they were interviewed themselves; on the other, they in turn interviewed friends and acquaintances of theirs who have been or are still involved in this kind of activity.

The following **model** of elite prostitution can be construed based on the thus collected information.

The organization of elite prostitutes is centered on fashion modeling agencies.¹⁵¹

The latter are typically owned by influential businesswomen, wives and girlfriends of leaders of economic groups and the former violent entrepreneurs.

¹⁴⁹ One such brigade consists of 3-4 people ("a carfull of people") who punish the erring pimps. For more details on punitive brigades see Center for the Study of Democracy, *The Drug Market in Bulgaria*, Sofia, 2003, p.36-37.

¹⁵⁰ Notwithstanding the general discreetness in political and criminal scandals, the names of models and agencies do sometimes come out in the mass media. In 1996, Interior Minister Lyubomir Nachev was filmed by the National Television surrounded by models on the day when three police officers were shot and was forced to resign. In 2006, there appeared pictures and contracts with modeling agencies of the former Head of Sofia Central Heating Company, Valentin Dimitrov, accused of scams amounting to millions. In 2007, the subject of compromising pictures with models came up again in the media in connection with the scandal involving Minister of Energy Rumen Ovcharov and the Head of the National Investigation Service, Angel Alexandrov.

¹⁵¹ The names of the agencies about which most information is available have been left out in order to avoid possible disputes and claims.

All of these companies are engaged in normal business activities providing models for fashion shows, advertising campaigns, TV shows, promotions, participation in film productions, magazine photo sessions, and other traditional services for modeling agencies. At the same time, **the leading principle with this kind of companies is the blurring of the boundaries between strictly modeling and escort-related duties** of the models. In the case of the latter, the transition from escort to paid sex services becomes of key importance to the agencies known for luxury prostitution. It should be noted that such a mixing of functions is observed throughout Eastern Europe and is particularly characteristic of Russia and Ukraine. With this kind of company, the structure may be described as comprising a core of two layers: an inner and a peripheral one.

Most fashion models in Bulgaria essentially receive **two kinds of job offers**. The first one includes typical **modeling assignments** – fashion shows, photo shoots, advertisements, promotions, etc. The second involves attending various functions and parties as agreed between the organizers and the agencies. At the agencies specializing in elite prostitution, **event attendance** jobs are assigned to girls from the "periphery". Models are often used by owners of entertainment establishments – mostly bars and discos – for whom the agencies provide a certain number of girls to simply hang around and attract customers. With this job the girls are not required to do anything else but act as customers of the establishment.

It should be noted that all of these services offered by model agencies are not illegal and it is not possible to speak of prostitution in this case. Furthermore, the girls involved take on the assignments of their own free will. This is essentially considered regular modeling work where the agency pays the model about 30-50 leva a night.

However, hiring is irregular and temporary. Anyone who is attractive enough and meets the age requirements is eligible. Such activities as a rule are more common in the largest towns in the country. It is an effective form of recruitment for both the normal model and photo agencies and those offering paid sex services. To the latter, it is an opportunity to form their inner "core" while making a profit and building an image of a regular modeling agency. At the same time, when involved in such peripheral activities they often exert steady and even aggressive pressure on the attractive looking models in order to hire them on a permanent basis.

Unlike the temporary jobs in the periphery, the **inner core** of the agencies is made up by girls on **permanent contracts**. The agencies involved in the market for luxury prostitution take special care in recruiting these girls. The chief mechanism is through beauty pageants which are held at least once a year in the larger towns of the country. The event is preceded by an active advertising campaign throughout the region in order to cover the smaller settlements, too. The main target group are girls aged 15-16 but there are many older participants, as well. The selected girls have to agree with the obligatory condition of moving to the agency's "modeling school", with all her expenses covered by the agency. Presumably this is done because the girl needs training and schooling in order to evolve and have a successful modeling career. The interviews, conducted for this paper, revealed that **such offers are perceived as an opportunity to achieve very high social status**. Even in families of very good social and financial standing, such

a career is regarded as extremely prestigious. It is uncertain what percentage of the girls (families) accept these offers. In such cases the conservative bent of the Bulgarian family comes into conflict with the prestige enjoyed by modeling agencies. Interestingly enough, **there is very little public awareness of the risk of prostitution in modeling agencies**. The interviews showed that acceptance of the offer for the girl leads to a dependence of sorts on the agency. Once they join the modeling schools, the girls are cut off from the old family and school environment, they get a taste of luxury consumption, and with subsequent access to individual advertising contracts, international contests and important clients, they gradually come to identify themselves with the agency. The **transition from professional modeling to paid escort services and ultimately paid sex** takes place on the basis of this dependence on the agency in the absence of coercion and violence. It was actually found in the interviews that the sex service acquires special value, it is perceived as an important and highly effective business instrument. According to the respondents, the agency owners and managers let go the girls deemed risky. As a rule, the acceptance of escort activities on the part of the girls occurs "spontaneously". The agencies, in their turn, operate without exerting particular pressure insofar as out of 10-15 new girls recruited there rarely drop out more than 2-3 in the early career stage.¹⁵² With more valuable models (very beautiful girls) special efforts at "socialization" might be made, such as extra investments in luxury consumption for the girl in question, inclusion in privileged social networks, etc.

In cases of mass recruitment of new models, for instance upon appearance of a new client, within two-three weeks the obligation to accept sex services as part of escort duties is explained in clear-cut terms and no efforts are made to retain those who prove unwilling.

The recruitment of new girls is of key importance in terms of keeping up service quality for the agencies offering elite prostitution owing to the extremely high attrition rate among the girls who have been working for 3-4 years. Leaving the business (temporarily or for good) because of "finding" a steady boyfriend or a husband is an ongoing process regarded as normal by the agencies. This manner of leaving the agency has become a standard procedure, particularly among the older models, in order to avoid their humiliating exclusion from the group serving important clients.

The most important part of the agencies engaged in luxury prostitution is the core. The models included in it get the best offers and have personal relationships with the **managers and owners of the agencies who often belong to the top ranks of organized crime**. When the agencies are associated with a semi-criminal ring or economic group, there is specialization of the girls from the core with regard to particular key figures. The models are aware of their agency's affiliation and respect the established influence zones of competing rings. In this respect, there is a certain ambiguity, as well. First of all, it is uncertain where personal relationship ends and sex service begins. Those who have worked longer for a particular agency owned by a shadow structure usually have steady intimate

¹⁵² Interviews with owners, managers and girls who have worked or are still working for modeling agencies and who wished to preserve their anonymity.

relationships with the management and their close associates and partners. Secondly, the models themselves commonly choose to start intimate relationships with company owners – usually businessmen who become clients of the shadow structure thanks to these relationships. All too often, elite prostitutes are used as instruments to gain influence over politicians, magistrates, and representatives of big multinational corporations. Such relationships, however, are voluntary and may not have been planned and arranged by the agency managers or owners, or the leaders of the ring. With services of this type, and in the event of success – the conclusion of a desired contract (e.g. a public procurement contract or contract with an international company), for instance, the girl is given a percentage of the contract amount.

On the whole, these relations between **agencies** engaged in elite prostitution and **economic groups** are of a highly **clientelist and hermetic** nature. Outside individuals and companies are not involved.

Because of the small size of Bulgaria, all the larger and more stable business structures are well-known and there is hardly a problem with unfamiliar persons and entities. As for foreign companies, there are two types of relations. If the company has already entered into clientelist relations with the respective Bulgarian economic group, it is entitled to the services described above. The situation is different when a company enters Bulgaria without the help of the main business players. In such cases, the advertising and PR departments of the large shadow structures try to establish relations through advertising contracts and after some initial probing they proceed to “bonding” at which stage the agencies offering elite sex services may be actively involved. The main goal is to secure deals for companies associated with the economic structure. In the event of deterioration of the relations with the foreign company, **racketeering might be resorted to**, but it would in all likelihood take place **through a government institution** rather than with the use of violence.

It should be borne in mind that, in addition to modeling and photo agencies, the shadow structures have their own **advertising companies** where there also are some representatives of luxury prostitution among the administrative or secretarial staff.

Possibly one of the biggest advantages of advertising agencies is that they provide the perfect **cover for sex services in the form of advertising contracts** in compliance with all international auditing requirements.

When analyzing the luxury prostitution structures they should be **distinguished from the normal modeling and photo agencies** that also offer escort services and attendance of promotional events. These agencies often employ models offering sex services but they do so without the backing of a company. There may also be some staff members who have a good idea of “who is willing to take on extra services for money”. When they approach the girls with such proposals, however, they are essentially working for themselves even if they enjoy the protection of leaders in organized crime. The independent intermediaries play the part of the typical procurer. They secure the client, guarantee payment, discretion, etc. These intermediaries may be from outside the fashion business and will

approach both girls working for normal agencies and for agencies specializing in luxury prostitution. In any case, at least half of the girls work in some other area. What is interesting about the latter group is that it includes the so-called stars – popular singers from the Bulgarian pop-folk genre; familiar faces from television, etc. However, these girls only work episodically, at very high rates, and only accept offers of some special interest to them. The role of the procurer, who in this case acts more like an agent, is to secure girls for wealthy clients. The procurer is often a woman and there is hardly any violence involved.

Luxury procurers work in a network with several centers and in many respects are independent. Compared to them, however, the **agencies offering elite prostitution** have a great advantage – the **access to international markets**. It should be noted that the admission of Bulgarian models into the international modeling agencies only became possible with the transformation of the world fashion industry, the end of the super-model era, and the invasion by elite models from the third world, which began in the mid-1990s.¹⁵³ To Bulgarian agencies participation in the international fashion shows in New York, Paris or Milan is now a matter of largely technical effort not requiring too big investments.

The free access to international fashion shows, international modeling agencies, beauty pageants, etc., have created remarkable **opportunities for access to extremely wealthy customers abroad**. The information about this aspect of the business, however, is scarce and distorted because access to such channels is granted largely to girls from the agency cores. They are very discrete about their prized foreign customers. Yet, the little that we know does shed some light on this type of international activity. There are the notorious cases of providing girls for yacht parties in the Mediterranean, as well as dozens of cases of hiring of girls for cruises in Greece, Italy, and Spain. The cooperation works the other way, too – when the foreign management of a Bulgarian telecommunications operator managed to get through several dozens of girls from the “luxury pool” of 4 agencies, they had to resort to seeking new girls in Serbia on a barter basis. The practice also exists to pay for temporary import of girls from the former Soviet Union, mainly of Ukrainian origin.

¹⁵³ See “Strike a Pose, Count Your Pennies: At 18, Bianca Gomez faces the new economics of modeling -- lower fees and a surge of Russians,” WSI February 3, 2007, (<http://blogs.wsi.com/runway/2007/02/03/strike-a-pose-count-your-pennies>); Not Just Another Pretty Face: The End of the Supermodel Era by Hilary Rowland, Hilary Magazine online retrieved July 7, 2006 (<http://www.hilary.com/fashion/supermodels.html>); Death of the Supermodels by C. L. Johnson, Urban Models October 21, 2002 online retrieved July 13, 2006 (<http://www.urbanmodels.co.uk/modeling.php?page=supermodels>). Although there is no shortage of names with supermodel pretensions, such as Gisele Bündchen, Carmen Kass, Heidi Klum, Yfke Sturm, Karolina Kurkova, Laetitia Casta, Kate Moss, Tyra Banks, Adriana Lima and still that of Naomi Campbell, and more recently, Doutzen Kroes, Robin Arcuri, Daria Werbowy, Iulia Stegner, Natalia Vodianova and Liva Kebede, nearly all fashion experts are talking about the end of the supermodel era. Various reasons are noted: from the trend to use famous movie actors, singers, athletes and other celebrities, to the wish of fashion designers to focus the attention on their collections rather than the model. The chief factor, however, has undeniably been globalization, which secures an unlimited supply of exotic third world beauties. One of the most popular sites, Models.com, reports 15,000 hits a month from places like Bulgaria, Kazakhstan or Mozambique (see WSI February 3, 2007).

The elite prostitutes own expensive cars, live in luxurious apartments, and spend enormous amounts of money on cosmetics and cosmetic surgery. Some of them use drugs, mainly cocaine.

The rates of elite prostitutes start from 500 leva and they are typically engaged for the whole evening rather than on an hourly basis. That is why the price can exceed 2000 leva. Their income can generally be said to be 3-4 times higher than the average earnings of the Bulgarian prostitutes working in Western Europe, moreover with considerably fewer customers and less risk. The reason is not so much in the higher rates but the fact that a larger share remains for the girl compared to the prostitutes working at the mid-level (brothels, windows, nightclubs) in Western Europe.

With this type of prostitution, the price of sex services can often not be directly calculated or fixed per time period. The deal usually covers a more extended period and the commitment is less straightforward. Payment can often come in the form of expensive gifts, even property, company stock, etc. In cases when foreign companies hire luxury prostitution agencies and win a contract, they pay a percentage of the contract amount to the girl (and the agency). There have been instances of corruption-related mediation and compensation in the form of luxury prostitutes.

It is in this context that in the late 1990s some foreign agencies put forward the hypothesis that **organized crime is successfully pursuing its plans to gain influence over the elites of East European countries** (the focus was chiefly on Russia) through luxury prostitution. The development of this type of services in Bulgaria suggests that it is a chaotic process rather than a matter of systematically pursued influence.

Resort Prostitution and Sex Tourism

With resort prostitution and prostitution related to sex tourism from Western Europe, which in many respects resemble export prostitution, the bulk of the revenues is generated by foreign nationals and is associated with the tourist season in both the summer and winter resorts of Bulgaria. Regarding sex tourism, even though there were attempts to offer such services already in the early 1990s, there has only been real growth since 2001, when Bulgaria came to be perceived as a safe country and the number of foreign tourists started growing by double-figured percentages each year.

What is typical of **resort prostitution** is that, at the onset of each season there begins a process of migration of prostitutes from the big cities in the interior of the country towards the Black Sea resorts – Sunny Beach, Golden Sands, or the mountain resorts – Borovets, Pamporovo, Bansko. This specific form of Bulgarian prostitution seems to occur in the border regions, as well – Svilengrad, Petrich, and Sandanski. Here, too, non-Bulgarian citizens constitute the principal source of revenues.

It is characteristic of this model of prostitution that it adheres to the structure described in the preceding sections, and at each level provides girls of the respective price range.

Thus, for instance, even in the resorts and border towns, the prostitutes take up the fixed posts, positioning themselves at highway junctions and streets away from the expensive hotels; the girls from the clubs are also grouped in accordance with the class of the establishment they come from. The main difference is that in the resorts and border areas, the prices are twice as high.

The level of the prostitutes matches the class of the hotels. The prostitutes working in cheap hotels differ little from street prostitutes and many of them, when they do not have customers at the hotel, go out in the streets of the resort to look for them. However, even the prostitutes from the cheapest hotels earn more than street prostitutes, with their rate usually ranging between 30 and 50 leva an hour.

In higher-class hotels, the rates are several times higher, in the range of 100 to 200 leva and can reach up to 500 leva in some of the most luxurious ones. In the largest seaside resorts, such as Sunny Beach and Golden Sands, prostitute rates depend on hotel proximity to the sea. The first lane (i.e. closest to the beach) is the most expensive one, with the second and third lanes coming next. Working in superior hotels has certain advantages, such as wealthier customers, and higher safety and discretion for the prostitute allowing her to avoid public condemnation and police checks, which are far more infrequent than out in the streets. Yet, the interviews found the paradox that with street prostitutes, the number of customers is far higher and the daily turnover and income of the procurer, respectively, may be larger than in luxury hotels.

Resort prostitution is well-organized, with high involvement of hotel owners. Some of them have stable connections with the political elites and for this reason usually remain out of the reach of police and prosecution authorities, who tend to concentrate their efforts on street prostitution, especially when it becomes more aggressive and conspicuous. At the same time, all of the consulted sources of information indicated that **prostitution in the resorts is almost entirely under the control of the former semi-criminal rings**, with the prostitutes and procurers operating as 'employees' of the respective ring rather than autonomous economic agents. Prostitution generates side revenue for these rings, primarily engaged in other, criminal as well as legal, activities.

A good illustration of the distribution of prostitution in Bulgarian resorts among the criminal rings is found in MoI intervention in early 2005 to prevent the war between two rings fighting for control over prostitution in Pamporovo resort. According to official reports, 52 people were apprehended in the police raid, members of the Plovdiv Club 777 ring and SIK.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁴ „The role of the Ministry of Interior in the fight against crime and the interaction between the special services and similar European and world structures”, <http://press.mvr.bg/Projects/Other/PP>, accessed on December 9, 2005; Zhelvezkova, Z. 2005, "MoI Chief Secretary Punishes Chiefs of Regional Police Departments in Plovdiv and Assenovgrad," <http://tvevropa.com/news.php?id=7986> accessed on November 26, 2005.

The development of events after the detentions in Pamporovo, as well as various incidents involving prostitutes in Varna, Bourgas, Golden Sands, and Sunny Beach have shown that the **local law-enforcement** and municipal **authorities have irregular relations with this business.**

Resort prostitution can in many respects be viewed as a stage preceding what is currently emerging as a market for sex tourism in Bulgaria.

3.3. EXPORT OF PROSTITUTION AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING. TRAFFICKING IN WOMEN

Unlike prostitution inside the country, the export of prostitutes as an international problem has been the object of research and analysis in reports by many international organizations and governments concerned with human trafficking, such as the International Migration Organization, US State Department, Germany's Federal Criminal Police Office (the BKA), Bulgarian and foreign NGOs. There have also been some investigative reports on the issue by Bulgarian journalists. Yet the focus in most of these studies has been largely on human trafficking rather than the export of prostitution and in particular, the prostitution of Bulgarian citizens abroad.

It should be noted that, similarly to the structure of the domestic market, prostitution abroad has many different forms, often not involving violence and organized crime. Nevertheless, human trafficking calls for special attention not only because of the utmost gravity of this crime and because it is a matter of international concern, but also because it constitutes a good starting point allowing a better grasp of the comprehensive phenomenon of Bulgarian prostitution abroad – the existing trends, profile of prostitutes, role of conventional and organized crime, etc. For this reason, we shall first consider the problems of trafficking in women for sexual exploitation and then attempt a broader overview of the export of prostitutes and the Bulgarian participation in the market for sex services in Western and Central Europe.

The Trafficking Problem and Its Definition

The 1999 estimate by Animus Association Foundation that 10,000 Bulgarian women fall victim to trafficking each year provoked open disagreement on the part of MoI authorities and the judiciary and ironic remarks that at this rate, in 7-8 years Bulgaria would be left without any female population aged 15 to 30. Skepticism and accusations of speculation still obstruct rational analysis. As a result, there is still no realistic assessment of the trends and dimensions of trafficking in Bulgaria.

One of the chief obstacles to the study of trafficking is its definition and how it is applied in practice. The principal elements of the definition (according to the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons of Palermo 2000 and a multitude of other tentative definitions preceding or following the Protocol) are: **recruitment, transportation and subsequent exploitation of**

persons. Exploitation includes sexual exploitation, forced labor, the removal of organs, slavery and servitude.

Despite the seemingly clear-cut terms of the definition, it poses a number of difficulties to researchers as well as law-enforcement institutions. For instance, the elements of recruitment and transportation may lack altogether in cases of voluntary emigration with subsequent exploitation. In other instances, the exploitation may be "voluntary" to some degree since it is hard to say to what extent the poor remuneration and conditions for certain types of prostitution, even if illegal, are an indicator of exploitation or simply a matter of underpaid labor under deplorable working conditions. The point of view of an individual deprived of the possibility to earn a living in his/her own country may be quite different from that of the legislator or the human rights activist.

An additional complication in defining human trafficking stems from the fact that it often tends to intertwine with **illegal migration**. As a result, the difference between trafficking and smuggling of persons all too often remains unclear. For example, in Bulgarian, the term "human trafficking" is commonly used to refer to "smuggling of persons". According to Europol, "as a result of the confusion of the terms 'human trafficking' and 'assisted illegal immigration' (or smuggling), the two are often taken to mean the same thing. Which is not the case."¹⁵⁵ The Palermo Protocol on trafficking distinguishes between the two phenomena, as well.

Indeed, **differentiating trafficking from smuggling** and vice versa can be extremely difficult. According to Inspector Paul Holms, expert with the International Migration Organization and former member of the London Police, in operative terms, the difference is the following: when the service/money exchange takes place in advance, we are dealing with **smuggling**; when a debt is to be paid off after arrival to the desired destination, it is a matter of **trafficking**.¹⁵⁶ From an analytical point of view this working definition only solves the problem partially. This is so because many instances of trafficking involve smuggling at some stage of the process. Furthermore, some of the women involved in trafficking enter the European Union as temporary immigrants or tourists with regular visas and passports and without the assistance of other persons. In these cases smuggling is not present as an element at all.

Additional confusion in defining and identifying human trafficking occurs because quite a few victims manage to adapt to the situation of forced prostitution and exploitation. Thus, **from trafficking victims they move to another category** – that of the illegally residing or illegally working, who have to some extent come to terms with the situation in which they find themselves (or would like to improve their situation but not if they have to go back to where they came from).¹⁵⁷ This

¹⁵⁵ Traffic in people for sexual exploitation: the viewpoint of Europol, Europol 2004 (<http://www.europol.eu.int/publications/SeriousCrimeOverviews/2004/THB.pdf>).

¹⁵⁶ Personal conversation, 2002.

¹⁵⁷ Beate Andrees and Mariska N.I. van der Linden Designing, *Trafficking Research from a Labour Market Perspective: The ILO Experience*, 2003, International Labour Organization, Geneva, Switzerland. The survey on human trafficking for forced labor purposes by Andrees and van der Linden, for instance, differentiates between persons involved in forced labor who do not identify themselves as trafficking victims and successful immigrants. The distinction is based on the degree of deception which they have been lured into, on their own assessment of the situation, and individual strategies for coping with subordination and coercion.

type of adaptation is often observed with sexual exploitation when under the influence of a number of factors – psychological (traumatic disorder or other consequences) and external ones (abuse, relationship with the trafficker/procurer, and others) – the trafficking victims turn into individuals who to some extent prostitute themselves voluntarily and get some payment for their work (even if minimal compared to the money they actually earn from the sex services provided).¹⁵⁸ In this sense, **the trafficking process can be defined as highly dynamic**. If a girl who was made to leave was to be detained at the border of Bulgaria with Macedonia, for example, she could still be identified and self-identify herself as a trafficking victim.¹⁵⁹ The same girl, after six months in a Dutch (or other) brothel, may no longer identify herself as a victim and would not be recognized as such. And since trafficking is such a dynamic phenomenon, unless it is identified in time, there is no case of trafficking. The number of such cases thus appears smaller than it actually is. Another typical situation would be a girl thinking she is going to work as a hotel maid, for example, and leaving of her own accord (smuggling may or may not be involved depending on how the emigration is arranged). At the time of crossing the border and in the absence of any information about what is to come there is no reason to identify the girl as a victim. However, once she finds herself in a brothel instead, without any ID papers or money and deprived of freedom of movement, she becomes a trafficking victim. In a few months time the same girl may still be a victim but may also prove to have adapted to the trafficking situation. Such examples by no means make trafficking a less grave crime and human rights violation but unfortunately they do make it harder to define, identify, and punish. Paradoxically enough, there are occasionally attempts to take advantage of such cases as well as of cases of women emigrating in order to work in the sex industry of their own free will and subsequently caught up in trafficking and exploitation. The case of trafficker Ivan Glavchev, alias Vanko 1, can be cited in illustration. The victims were actually aware that they would be prostituting but counted on sharing the profit equally with the procurer.¹⁶⁰

Tentative Assessment of the Scope of the Problem by Recent Data

According to most researchers and analysts, **Bulgaria is largely a country of origin and a transit country with regard to the trafficking in women** for prostitution. According to the European Centre for Crime Prevention, 80-90% of the trafficking in Europe occurs for sexual exploitation purposes.¹⁶¹

Since 1999, the figure 10,000 from the above-mentioned estimate of Animus Association Foundation, has been reproduced mechanically from one report to another. In fact, it is unclear what data were used to make this estimate or how it was arrived at. Furthermore, even if this was indeed the number of victims for the period 1998-99, it is naïve to assume it has remained unchanged through all these years. By a more recent estimate of the European Centre for Crime Prevention and Control, the annual number of trafficking victims in Bulgaria ranges between 3,000 and 4,000.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁸ Assuming that providing sex services is work, which too has been subject to fierce debate.

¹⁵⁹ In the present text, the term 'victim' is used in the sense of 'victim of crime' and does not intend to further victimize the people caught up in trafficking.

¹⁶⁰ See the interview with investigator Evgeni Dikov, *Trud* daily, 13 May 2005.

¹⁶¹ Animus Association, *Trafficking in Women: Questions and Answers*, 2000.

¹⁶² Heinu, Lehti M. *Trafficking in Women and Children in Europe*, Paper N 18, 2003.

The little reliable data on trafficking include the number of **victims who have been identified by the police or have sought the help of a non-governmental organization** in Bulgaria or abroad. Such is the data used in the present overview of trafficking in Bulgaria, as well. By data of the Regional Clearing Point (RCP) with the Stability Pact in Belgrade, the number of victims – Bulgarian and foreign nationals – who have received assistance in Bulgaria between 2000 and 2003 is at least 423. Of these, 352 were Bulgarian citizens and 71, foreigners.¹⁶³ The group of the Bulgarian citizens is made up largely by girls and women who came back to Bulgaria of their own accord with the help of assistance programs, as well as girls and women identified as victims by the police in the country where they used to reside. The data produced by RCP are a minimum estimate and come close to those collected by the International Organization on Migration (IOM) and published in 2005, which constitute the most exhaustive source to date on the cases of trafficking registered in Bulgaria. According to IOM, the number of victims of Bulgarian nationality identified and assisted in Bulgaria in the period from January 2000 to December 31, 2004 was 620 and the number of foreign nationals identified in Bulgaria in the same period was 86.

Table 7. Number of identified trafficking victims in Bulgaria

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	Total
Foreign nationals	24	41	4	6	11	86
Bulgarian citizens	46	96	164	172	142	620

Source: Data published by IOM¹⁶⁴

According to RCP, who cite data by Animus Association Foundation obtained through partner organizations abroad, in addition to the victims identified in Bulgaria, between early 2000 and May 2002, there were 485 Bulgarian women who became victims of trafficking and sought help outside Bulgaria, and 21 women and girls received assistance in Italy in 2002.¹⁶⁵

We could further add data about crimes related to prostitution and sexual exploitation from Belgian and German criminal statistics for 2001-2005; data from Greek criminal statistics for 2004-2005; trafficking victim data from the Netherlands for 2000-2003 (see *Table 8*). According to the data from all four countries, a total of 938 girls were registered as trafficking victims.

¹⁶³ Stability Pact Task Force: Belgrade, First Annual Report on Victims of Trafficking in South Eastern Europe, Counter-Trafficking Regional Clearing Point of the Stability Pact Task Force, 2003, p.49.

¹⁶⁴ IOM, International migration data and statistics, World Migration 2005: costs and benefits of international migration, Geneva, 2005.

¹⁶⁵ See RCP 2003, p. 55. In addition, 9 Bulgarians applied for a B9 residence permit (granted to victims of trafficking) between 1996 and June 2002 in the Netherlands. No information is available about the number of applicants per year. (Dutch National Rapporteur, 2003)

Table 8. Registered victims of trafficking

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	Total
Germany		24	91	128	127	62	432
Belgium		11	44	74	29	182	340
Netherlands	19	40	59	48			147
Greece					10	9	19
Total		75	194	250	166	253	938

Clearly, IOM and Animus Association have by no means used all of the data from Germany, Netherlands, Belgium, and Greece, since the sum of the registered girls in these 4 countries in 2002-2004 exceeds the figure cited by the Bulgarian and the international organization.

It should equally be noted that for the period from late 2003 to the end of the first half of 2005, the Bulgarian National Investigation Service (NIS) conducted 60 investigations on human trafficking and worked on 56 requests for investigation from court authorities of foreign countries. Nearly half of these requests came from the three countries for which data is available – 6 from Belgium, 8 from Germany, and 19 from the Netherlands.¹⁶⁶

Based on Animus Association data on trafficking victims who turned for help to the organization's Crisis Center on more than one occasion in 2003, 2004, and 2005, it is possible to make a rough estimate of the annual flow of trafficking victims coming from Bulgaria.

Table 9. Victims seeking help from the Animus Crisis Center

Year	One-time visitors	Repeat visitors
2003	32	3 in 2004 2 in 2005
2004	50	3 in 2004 4 in 2005
2005	33	2 in 2005

Source: Coordinator of the AAF crisis unit, January 2006

¹⁶⁶ National Investigation Service (NIS). *Genezis, razvitie i proiavni formi na organizirana prestapnost v Balgaria*. Sofia, 2005, p.121

Using the **capture-recapture method**,¹⁶⁷ it is possible to make the following estimate: the number of victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation in 2003 is estimated at a minimum of 267, and in 2004, at least 275. Since data on repeat visits are only missing from one support center for victims in Bulgaria, these figures should be added to the results obtained on the basis of data from other organizations to obtain a very crude estimate of the scope of trafficking in women for prostitution in Bulgaria. Thus computed, it remains incomplete due to lack of accurate information about the number of victims who sought assistance from other organizations, as well as the number of repeat visits. Comparing the data from Animus Association with those of IOM on the overall number of identified trafficking victims (see Table 7) it is possible to estimate the number of trafficking victims at approximately 1,436 in 2003 and 781, in 2004. Once again, these are tentative figures assuming the rate of visits is similar in the various centers. If this is not the case, the figure may well be in the range of several thousand girls and women, as estimated by the European Institute for the Prevention of Crime – 3,000-4,000 per year.¹⁶⁸

Profile of Trafficking Victims in Bulgaria Based on Registered Cases

IOM reports that 88% of the victims who sought help from its victim assistance programs between early 2000 and July 2004 came from Romania, Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, Bulgaria, and the Dominican Republic. These data are not representative about the number and origin of trafficking victims from Bulgaria or about the country's place in international trafficking since the IOM data base compiled over the past 5 years only includes information from the organization's regional offices that have been established in some Balkan countries, including Bulgaria, as well as in some countries of Africa, Asia, and Latin America.¹⁶⁹ Nevertheless, this information does provide some idea about the profile of trafficking victims in Bulgaria although according to IOM and other researchers, victim profile is difficult to define on the basis of the available data.

Age and Social Status of Trafficking Victims

According to IOM, most of the Bulgarian citizens, who become victims of trafficking are women aged between 18 and 25, typically unemployed and with no regular income, with low education and coming from problem families.¹⁷⁰ Table 10 shows the age-group distribution of Bulgarian trafficking victims.

¹⁶⁷ The basic capture-recapture method is based on a "two-sample model". It involves an initial random sampling of the population, marking the samples, releasing the marked samples back into the population and then recapturing another sample randomly from the population. Based on the number of individuals captured in both samples, it is possible to estimate the total population. The assumption is that all individuals have the same probability of being captured.

¹⁶⁸ See Heintz, 2003

¹⁶⁹ IOM 2005, p. 418; IOM have an office and programs for trafficking victims in Santo Domingo.

¹⁷⁰ IOM 2005: p. 6 and pp. 418-420; according to NIS data, a mere 5% of trafficking victims are male.

Table 10. Age distribution of trafficking victims in 2000–2004

Under 14	Per cent
14–17 years old	6.54 %
18–24 years old	64.49 %
25–30 years old	12.15 %
Over 30	14.02 %
NA	2.80 %

Source: Data published by IOM; IOM statistics on international migration

According to RCP, based on data from IOM, as well as other victim support organizations in Bulgaria and abroad, nearly half of the cases registered in 2002 involved girls aged under 18 and one-third, young women aged 18 to 24. Thus, in 2002, the largest proportion of trafficking victims were under-aged girls (48 %). The cases reviewed by Stateva in the 1997–2000 period also involve girls under 18 and young women under 21.¹⁷¹ The recurrent 15–21 age profile finds another confirmation in the conclusion of NIS of 2005 that the average age of the victims is 18 to 25 and there is generally a trend toward falling age of the victims.¹⁷²

According to RCP (2003), 10–15 % of the female victims in 2002 had children (there is no data about whether they had children before they fell victim to trafficking or gave birth later), and by IOM data, 27 % of the Bulgarian women assisted under their programs between 2000 and 2004 had children, with 82.8 % being single mothers.

Education

A large number of the Bulgarian female victims included in the IOM database only went to school to the 4th or 6th grade, 30.8 % and 22.4 %, respectively, and 4.7 % had no education at all. Thus 57.9 % of all female victims have no high-school education and 28.9 % have graduated high school.¹⁷³ If we go back to older data about Bulgaria, a similar education profile is found for the women victims of trafficking in 1997–2000, with 37.5 % having primary education and 33.4 % still school students.¹⁷⁴ According RCP (2003), most of the women victims in 2002 also had relatively low education (the data are contradictory as to the proportion of high-school graduates and of those with primary education).

Family History

The information about the family history of trafficking victims for the period 2000–2004 is scarce. The available data on the women involved in trafficking between 1997 and 2000 who visited the Rehabilitation Center with Animus Association in

¹⁷¹ Stateva, M., *Izsledvane na sluchai na trafik na zheni*, Sofia, 2001

¹⁷² NIS 2005, p. 121

¹⁷³ IOM 2005, p. 419

¹⁷⁴ Animus Association, *Trafficking in Women: Questions and Answers*, 2001 p. 46–47.

that period shows that 10 women (43.5%) had grown up in families with severe forms of domestic violence and 6 women were victims of incest.¹⁷⁵ International studies on prostitution and trafficking have found that among the women and girls engaged in prostitution in general, quite a few have experienced some form of abuse (including sexual) in the family, as well as sexual abuse outside the family. A 2004 study by the British Poppy Project, which offers victim support, found that of all female trafficking victims interviewed (of whom 75% came from Eastern Europe), 38% had experienced various forms of abuse prior to getting involved in trafficking; 46% were victims of sexual abuse and/or rape; 31% had suffered sexual abuse in their childhood; and 46% had experienced domestic violence in the family (typically as children).¹⁷⁶ Additional insight into the family environment of trafficking victims is provided by the Animus Association data of 1997-2000: 13% were found to be children of divorced or separated parents; 25.7% came from single-parent families (for some of the women, it was a single mother with more than 3 other children); 4.3% of the victims included in the survey were orphans.

Regions of Origin

According to the National Investigation Service, the following regions in Bulgaria are most affected by human trafficking: Bourgas, Russe, Plovdiv, Pazardjik, and border regions like Svilengrad and Petrich.¹⁷⁷ Animus Association data provide additional information about the victims' places of origin. The towns of Varna, Dobrich, and Russe, the border regions of Blagoevgrad, Kjustendil, Kurdiali, and Petrich, as well as smaller settlements in these regions, are places where there are many women victims of trafficking. In an analysis of trafficking in Bulgarian women of 2001, the National Coordinator of La Strada Program for Bulgaria, Nadva Kozhuharova,¹⁷⁸ mentioned a village in Varna District where three trafficking victims were found to come from. By Animus Association data, they are not the only victims from that location.¹⁷⁹ Such cases call for closer analysis in terms of the ways of involving the girls in trafficking and the role of organized criminal groups in the process. Equally worthy of attention are the areas where there seems to be no human trafficking (if that really is the case). According to NIS, such regions are Smolyan, Montana, Lovech, and Yambol.¹⁸⁰

Recruitment Methods

Up to 2001, Bulgarian citizens needed visas to travel to most European Union countries. In 2001, the visas for most European countries were dropped. It is only logical to assume that with the lifting of visa limitations, there would be changes in the dynamics of human trafficking and of migration practices in general since traveling abroad had become easier. Thus IOM reports that **human trafficking victims increasingly cross the borders through the official checkpoints with regular**

¹⁷⁵ Stateva, M., op.cit., p. 47

¹⁷⁶ Kelly, E. "You can Find Anything You Want: A Critical Reflection on Research on Trafficking in Persons within and into Europe." – *International Migration*, January 2005, vol. 43 (1–2).

¹⁷⁷ NIS, 2005, p. 122

¹⁷⁸ Animus Association, *Trafficking in Women: Questions and Answers*, 2001

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 19

¹⁸⁰ NIS, 2005, p. 122

identification documents.¹⁸¹ NIS confirms this trend and what is more, all too often, after expiry of the three-month term of residence in an EU country the victims are brought back to Bulgaria and subsequently taken out again. NIS also notes that some countries issue working visas for prostitution of Bulgarian citizens (e.g. Austria).¹⁸² In connection with the opportunities created by visa-free travel, Dutch researchers have observed that the number of Bulgarian prostitutes in Amsterdam visibly increased after 2001.¹⁸³ There is, however, no reliable information as to whether human trafficking has increased or it is a matter of increasing migration for the purpose of working in the sex industry.¹⁸⁴

RCP point to unemployment and the wish for a better life as the main factors for exposure to trafficking. Between 2000 and May 2002, 59% of all those surveyed left to work in the entertainment industry and services (deceived with promises of jobs in clubs, hotels, and restaurants); 4% received an invitation (the survey did not register the purpose of the visit); and 1% left for the purpose of marriage.

The ways of involvement in trafficking prior to 2001 are largely in practice even now. In view of the victim profile outlined above, it would seem that the reasons and conditions conducive to trafficking have undergone little change over the past years even though none of the cited sources provides representative data. According to an unpublished survey of Animus Association Foundation, 38% of the victims were kidnapped in the street; 33.3% were lured by promises of good jobs abroad; 22.2% were sold by relatives; 2.8% left as tourists; and 2.8% were blackmailed on account of financial debts. The percentages have been calculated on the basis of 36 cases on which information was available and the data are not representative regarding the involvement of Bulgarian women since some (even if few) of the victims registered with the Animus Association center were not Bulgarian citizens. Nevertheless, they do provide some idea about trafficking practices in Bulgaria up to 2000. A comprehensive review of all studies on trafficking in women in Bulgaria from the late 1990s to 2005 shows that **the largest number of victims were involved in trafficking by false promises of employment.** For example, RCP data for 2000-2002 indicate that Bulgarian women and girls were for the most part involved in trafficking by job promises.¹⁸⁵ It was likewise observed in the NIS report of 2005 that job offers usually concern the following occupations: waitresses, dancers, actresses, housemaids, photo models. The proposed remuneration by far exceeds payment in Bulgaria.¹⁸⁶ Based on investigation findings, NIS further concluded that in Bulgaria, **many cases of trafficking occur with the victim's consent**, and the use of violence and threats is not as common (there is no indication of whether this consent was the result of deceit). Thus, according to NIS, more than one-fourth of the women realized or supposed they would be working in the sex industry abroad. What most of

¹⁸¹ International migration data and statistics, World Migration 2005: costs and benefits of international migration, IOM, 2005, Geneva.

¹⁸² NIS, 2005, p. 115

¹⁸³ Trafficking in Human Beings – Third report of the Dutch National Rapporteur, Bureau NRM, The Hague, 2005.

¹⁸⁴ *First Annual Report on Victims of Trafficking in South Eastern Europe*, Counter-Trafficking Regional Clearing Point of the Stability Pact Task Force 2003, Stability Pact Task Force: Belgrade.

¹⁸⁵ Counter-Trafficking Regional Clearing Point of the Stability Pact Task Force 2003, *First Annual Report on Victims of Trafficking in South Eastern Europe*, Stability Pact Task Force: Belgrade., p.50

¹⁸⁶ NIS, 2005, p. 119

those leaving of their own accord are not aware of the working conditions, which include poor remuneration, abuse, insecurity, performance of sex services without protection. According to NIS, the women's expectations, typically including a considerable degree of independence and control of their own work, are drastically at odds with reality.¹⁸⁷

The following trend emerges among the mechanisms of involvement: in many cases **the victims know, and sometimes are related to, the recruiters** (Table 11). According to NIS, the involvement of family relations is particularly characteristic of trafficking of persons of Roma origin. IOM data (2005), which are incomplete since information is not available on all of the cases registered, indicate that 57.94% of those who actually involved the victims in trafficking were male and 30.8%, female. According to NIS statistics, 95% of the perpetrators are male, a large number of them with low level of education and previous convictions of violence.

Table 11. Persons responsible for involving the victim in trafficking

	Per cent
Family member/Other relative	8.41 %
Partner	3.74 %
Friend	23.36 %
Procurer	0.93 %
Stranger	38.32 %
Other	–
NA	25.23 %

Source: Data published by IOM in 2005¹⁸⁸

There are various **mechanisms of control over the victims** and these are often applied in combination. They include: binding through indebtedness by demanding reimbursement for greatly exaggerated costs of organizing the trip; depriving the victims of their identification papers; isolation; frequent transfers from one place to another; abuse (emotional, physical, and sexual) and threats against the victim's family and friends.¹⁸⁹

The Role of Organized Crime in Human Trafficking

According to analyses by the authorities, as confirmed by numerous studies in the past 15-20 years, a large part of human trafficking in Europe, particularly for sexual exploitation purposes, is in the hands of organized crime. The chief precondition for this is that in many countries the sex industry is held in monopoly by organized criminal groups. It is worth noting that **organized crime is most**

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ IOM, 2005, p. 421

¹⁸⁹ See Chomarova, 2001, pp. 22-26; NIS 2005, p. 120

active in this very type of trafficking – for prostitution purposes – because of the huge profits generated by this particular crime. NIS reports, for instance, that a single girl can ensure € 12.000 to 18.000 net profit a month;¹⁹⁰ six girls are thus enough to secure an income of €1 million a year.

In this sense, the trafficking in women, girls and less commonly, men, for sexual exploitation purposes and organized crime are directly connected. This applies to a high degree to Bulgaria, too, where prostitution is controlled by criminal rings and independent practice, by some opinions, is virtually impossible.

At the same time, the claim that the entire traffic for sexual exploitation purposes from and to Bulgaria is run by organized crime is clearly a misrepresentation. The screening of accessible criminal investigations on trafficking in Bulgaria, Central and Western Europe has shown that **there are numerous cases of small groups** and individually operating procurers of whom there is no evidence of affiliation with organized crime. Most of the information, however, is fragmentary and some of it comes from indirect sources such as media publications and investigative reports. It is therefore difficult to determine the actual influence of organized crime.

What is common with **individual, group, and organized crime** is that, as a rule, human trafficking for prostitution begins long before the stage of sexual exploitation since the transportation and crossing of the border checkpoints, arranging legal visas or false papers, financing the trip and the other formalities in the process of emigration are all areas of criminal activity. This is a process that may involve national criminal organizations and networks of several criminal organizations cooperating on specific projects, as well as individual local participants.

Types of Organization of Human Trafficking by Criminal Rings

Even though there exist various forms of trafficking for sexual exploitation that are unrelated to organized crime, the available data gives reason to assume it plays a **structurally determining role**. This is why organized crime models in human trafficking are of special interest in analyzing the problem in Bulgaria.

According to Monzini,¹⁹¹ the **criminal groups** involved in trafficking in women can be divided into three main categories: **small and loosely connected criminal groups, middle-size criminal groups, and complex transnational criminal organizations**. With the first kind, the recruiters also act as transporters and exploiters. They are often friends or acquaintances of the future victims. Abroad, they establish contacts with local criminal networks (preferably of the same nationality) operating at the lowest levels of illegal prostitution. For instance, Monzini cites Czech groups in Austria, Albanian groups in Italy, and Polish ones in Germany. The next category deals largely with recruitment and transportation, "selling" their victims to middlemen, usually in capital cities and border areas. Some of these groups also organize the so-called "mobile prostitution" – moving women from

¹⁹⁰ NIS, 2005, p. 118

¹⁹¹ Monzini, P. *Trafficking in Women and Girls and the Involvement of Organised Crime, with Reference to the Situation in Central and Eastern Europe*. Paper presented at the first Annual Conference of the European society of Criminology, September 6–8, 2001.

one town or brothel to another. They are relatively well-organized and include recruiters, bodyguards, people who choose the routes and arrange transportation, and decision-makers who negotiate the financial conditions with pimps and nightclub owners. The last category – that of transnational organizations – includes organized criminal groups able to coordinate each phase of the trafficking process. These are criminal networks with a high degree of specialization by area of activity (from recruitment to laundering the profits). Their leaders are usually engaged in some legal business and do not have any direct and/or visible connection to human trafficking.¹⁹²

Elisabeth Kelly¹⁹³ reviews the models of organized crime and trafficking in women in Eastern Europe proposed by Louise Shelley, et al.,¹⁹⁴ and the UN Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention. According to these models, the criminal groups dealing with human trafficking in Eastern Europe and the Balkans have the following characteristics:

Table 12. Typology of organized crime and typology of human trafficking in the Balkans and Eastern Europe

Typology of organized crime (general model common in Eastern Europe and in China) <i>Source: UN Office on Drugs and Crime</i>	Typology of human trafficking <i>Source: Louise Shelley¹⁹⁵</i>
<p><i>Standard hierarchy</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single leader • Clearly defined hierarchy • Internal discipline • Known by a specific name • Strong social/ethnic identity • Violence essential to activities • Influence/control over the defined territory 	<p><i>Natural resource model (characteristic of post-soviet organized crime)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chiefly dealing with trafficking in women • The victims are treated as a natural resource • The victims are sold to the most proximate buyer • High degree of violence and violation of the victims' human rights <p><i>Violent entrepreneur model (characteristic of the Balkans)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Almost exclusively dealing with trafficking in women • Middlemen to Russian organized crime • Increasingly well-integrated as they take over the sex services market in the destination countries • Connected to top-level law-enforcement officials in the home country • Profits from trafficking used to finance other illicit activities; invest in property and businesses abroad • Significant use of violence

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Kelly, E., Op. cit., p. 251

¹⁹⁴ Shelley, L., "Trafficking in Women: The Business Model Approach," Brown Journal of International Affairs, Vol. X, Issue 1, 2003.

¹⁹⁵ Kelly, L., Op.cit., p. 251

While the UNODC model is more general, the models outlined by Shelley to some extent overlap with the groups described by Monzini. There is not sufficient data to decide which one is more relevant to trafficking in women from Bulgaria. There is a certain reason to believe that different types of criminal groups are involved in human trafficking in Bulgaria, some of which regional ones (e.g. groups from Bourgas, Pazardjik and Sliven¹⁹⁶). No specific information is available on the organization of trafficking for forced labor or for other purposes.

Organized Crime Roles at Various Stages in Trafficking in Women

Regardless of the type of group to which they belong, the members of criminal groups take on the following roles in the trafficking in women:

- **Selecting and recruiting potential victims.**¹⁹⁷ The role of the trafficker may be to kidnap a girl or a woman from the street or to get friendly with a woman and propose a relationship or job (usually abroad). At the lowest levels the traffickers are usually local people who know (sometimes only indirectly) a specific woman or girl or her family and friends. Part of the process of recruitment is the collection of information about the victims and their families. It is used to decide which girl is suitable, as well as to subsequently threaten and blackmail the victim. Thus, for instance, if a trafficked woman has a younger sister she will be threatened that if she does not obey her trafficker or procurer and tries to escape, her sister will be forced to prostitute herself, too. Such cases are familiar to the victim support organizations. Information matters even when selecting the victim – if she comes from a very poor family; or from a dysfunctional family; if her mother is a prostitute or the father, an alcoholic; if she lives alone with her elderly grandmother because her parents abandoned her (all examples from real-life case histories of trafficking). The less resources the woman has to defend herself (at the time of recruitment and later), the easier it is to lure and recruit her. In some Roma meta-groups, a very common recruitment method used by the criminal groups (especially a few years ago) is the promise of marriage and many girls get officially engaged to their traffickers with the consent and approval of their families.¹⁹⁸ The practice also exists for a woman to be sold for trafficking by friends, family, or acquaintances. Even these cases are usually connected to organized crime. Last but not least, there is the practice of abduction, also carried out by organized criminal groups. Specific cases of kidnapping are familiar to victim support organizations.¹⁹⁹
- **Subjugating the victim.** As a rule, those who first use physical and psychological violence against the victim are members of criminal groups. The abuse may include sexual abuse, torture, beatings, humiliation, hunger, iso-

¹⁹⁶ NIS 2005; also, *168 Chassa* weekly, April 1-7, 2005.

¹⁹⁷ In this case "victim" is only used to refer to a victim of crime.

¹⁹⁸ Such practices have been described for Albania; the approval concerns the engagement and does not necessarily imply awareness that they will be involved in trafficking; see Davies, *Aspects of Albanian trafficking methods: reinventing the Kanun as the extreme of co-dependency*, A briefing document prepared for the French Court of Appeal, Migration Research Centre, University of Sussex, 2000.

¹⁹⁹ An account of such a case appeared in *Trud* daily, August 8, 2001.

lation. All too often, violence is resorted to even before leaving the country and the victim may be forced to prostitute herself in Bulgaria first, usually in some other town.²⁰⁰

- **Making the travel arrangements and transporting the victims.** Criminal groups are involved at this stage, too. An important task is to secure the necessary documents, organize transportation and make other travel arrangements. Prior to 2001, mainly forged visas and passports were used but since then they have not been necessary for initial trafficking to most West-European countries. Sometimes, with her behavior and being unaware of the actual purpose and risks involved, the girl herself can make it easier to cross the border. In some cases, resisting women are drugged during the trip so as not to create problems. Border crossing can also be arranged with the help of corrupt officers from the border agencies. A great many women actually choose to prostitute themselves outside Bulgaria.
- **Upon arrival** in the destination country they are met by a middleman or procurer and ultimately end up in a nightclub, brothel, private home, or in the street, all controlled to a varying degree by criminals. It is not uncommon for the victim to be sold by one criminal group to another, different from the one that initially recruited her for trafficking.
- **Controlling prostitution.** As mentioned above, in many countries, particularly in ones where prostitution is prohibited but even in countries where it is legal, the sex industry is largely controlled by criminal groups.

Because trafficking is a process, **organized criminal groups and members thereof may only be involved in some of the above-outlined stages.** At other stages, the victims or the middlemen may not have interacted with organized criminal groups, e.g. in emigration assisted by relatives or emigration with the aid of a legitimate agency or friends and acquaintances but which ends up as trafficking.

The Evolution

The above-outlined stages in the organization of trafficking in many respects reflect the period up to 2001-2002.

In this context, it is necessary to bear in mind the developments in Eastern Europe and the Balkans that are creating increasing risk of emergence of procurer networks forcibly exploiting young women. In the early years of the transition, in countries like the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia, the Bulgarian and international procurer networks used systematic violence. However, after the economic and social stabilization of these countries there were a series of law-enforcement operations that dismantled dozens of structures using Bulgarian girls. A similar situation occurred in the Balkan countries with the end of the regime of Milosevic and the disappearance of the areas of military operations. In Bulgaria, the semi-criminal rings started avoiding recourse to violence as early as 1997-1998 (the first attempts to reduce violence date back to 1995). Once

²⁰⁰ See *Trafficking in Women: Questions and Answers*, p. 5 and p. 34

the negotiations for the country's EU accession were under way and particularly as the issue of Bulgarian organized crime was brought up with special emphasis, even the freelance procurers began to adjust their criminal activity to the new situation. There emerges an ever more definite orientation toward the market models of voluntary prostitution.

In the opinion of officers working in the area of trafficking in women for sexual exploitation, as confirmed by NIS reports, the following notable tendencies have emerged in the past 3-4 years:

- The use of threat and violence, particularly in international trafficking, is becoming ever less common.
- Persons in financial and social difficulty are most at risk.
- The victims are aware of the nature, but are deceived about the conditions, of work.²⁰¹

NIS also notes an evolution in trafficker-victim relations. According to NIS, threat and violence have given way to payment schemes including fines and penalties. In some cases the victims manage to earn the procurer's trust and get to work under better conditions while supervising other trafficking victims.²⁰² Rudiments of this tendency were observed as early as 2001 and 2002 in the Netherlands where, according to Van Dyke, 26% of the traffickers were women and most were victims of trafficking themselves.²⁰³ There have been reports in the press about specific cases when control over Bulgarian prostitutes in the destination country is entirely taken over by women who have earned the procurers' trust and not all of whom are trafficking victims.²⁰⁴

The Export of Prostitution Beyond Human Trafficking

The focus of foreign governments, as well as of Bulgarian and international NGOs, on the human trafficking problem has left aside an alarming social phenomenon of unforeseeable consequences for Bulgaria – the mass export of prostitution from the country and the Bulgarian share in the sex service markets of Central and Western Europe. The interviews conducted under the present study, surveys carried out in Western Europe, and analyses by police agencies in various European countries all point to the fact that **voluntary prostitution outside the country is in fact the typical phenomenon while forcible prostitution is considerably less widespread**. The data indicate that forcible prostitution outside the country was a common practice in the early to mid-1990s, when export was still highly limited and affected an insignificant percentage of the population. As Bulgarians entered the sex service markets in Central and Western Europe on a mass scale, the practices started to change. Prostitution came to be perceived as "a very well-paid job in the West" and the procurer's position, as a necessary logistical role.

²⁰¹ NIS 2005, pp.118-119

²⁰² Ibid, p. 121

²⁰³ Dutch National Rapporteur, 2003 Report

²⁰⁴ *168 Chassa* weekly, April 1-7, 2005

It was further established in the course of the research that allegations of trafficking and sexual exploitation have become an effective instrument used in the competition between different procurer networks. In many EU countries, self-identification as a trafficking victim proves to be a good opportunity for legitimization in the labor market, including for continued unproblematic prostitution. Attempts to follow up on the fate of the victims of sexual exploitation have found that in a huge proportion of cases the girls continue to work for another procurer network, independent procurer, or on their own.

The focus on the trafficking in women for sexual exploitation and the realization that it only accounts for a small part of the Bulgarian share in the European market for sex services have raised the issue of the magnitude of the prostitution export phenomenon.

Tentative Estimate of the Export of Prostitution

According to the main Bulgarian participants in the market for sex services outside the country (former and current prostitutes, procurers, and brothel owners), **non-voluntary prostitution** (involving various forms of coercion) **hardly exceeds 5-10%**. Similar findings were reported by the Women's Alliance for Development survey conducted in 2006, namely that 92% of the prostitutes outside Bulgaria were volunteers.²⁰⁵ While it is unclear what methodology was employed and even though representative surveys of prostitution are basically impossible to conduct, the data do provide some insight in estimating Bulgarian prostitution abroad.

The proportion of forcible to voluntary prostitution makes it possible to fix the coefficient with which to multiply the data on the trafficking in women for sexual exploitation and thus **roughly estimate the number of prostitutes**. Assuming that the voluntary prostitution coefficient is in the range of 10 to 20, i.e. corresponding to 90-95% voluntary prostitution, and using the data on trafficking from the four countries of Greece, Belgium, Netherlands, and Germany for the period 2000-2005, when the average annual number of victims was 200-250, then the total number of prostitutes in these countries alone, for any one year, should amount to 2,000 to 5,000 (depending on whether multiplying by 10 or by 20). If the trafficking estimate obtained by the capture-recapture method is taken, with data of 1436 trafficking victims in 2003 and 781 in 2004, this would produce an estimate of 8-14,000 prostitutes annually. The problem with this approach is that the timeframe of one year is insufficient to assess the scope. Interviews with former prostitutes and procurers have found that the length of service in the sex services sector is usually under 10 years but more than 5 years on average. Therefore, the question arises, what percentage of the new prostitutes entering the market seek assistance and what percentage of all prostitutes seek assistance over the minimum period of five years. Several factors need to be taken into account in this respect but they are difficult to measure owing to the shortage of quantitative empirical information. The only available data for a more extended period of time are from Greece, Netherlands, Belgium, and Germany. These concern 2000-2005 but information is not available for each year and country. The

²⁰⁵ Quoted in "Market for sex services on the rise, the public acts surprised," *Trud* daily, August 6, 2006

total number of registered victims is 938 and if we multiply this figure by the minimum coefficient of 10, we would obtain at least about 10.000 girls for these 4 countries alone. It is unclear, however, what percentage of these girls were registered as victims more than once. The data from European criminal services indicate that 30 to 50% of the victims have previously worked in another country.²⁰⁶ In order to minimize risk, the procurers and prostitutes often change cities and states. Interviews with Bulgarian officers have revealed that a definite number of the girls have sought assistance in two or more EU countries. In this connection, it remains uncertain what proportion of those registered in 2000-2005 in Belgium, the Netherlands, and Germany sought assistance in more than one country. By estimates of Bulgarian officers working with trafficking victims, hardly more than 20-30% do so on more than one occasion. Therefore, within a five-year period in all 4 countries, the likely number of victims seeking assistance for the first time is 600 to 700. In turn, using the minimum coefficient of 10,²⁰⁷ this means a total of 6.000-7.000 girls.

In addition to these four countries, it should be borne in mind that there is also a considerable Bulgarian presence in Austria, Czech Republic, Hungary, and particularly in France, Italy and Spain. Unfortunately, only fragmentary data are available for countries such as England, Ireland, Portugal, and Scandinavia in general. According to the interviews conducted within the present study, in the period 2002-2005, France, Italy and Spain in particular, have become preferred destinations for prostitution. In view of the demographic characteristics and based on what little information is available from police services in these countries, the number of girls working there can be estimated at about 7-8.000. Adding less popular destinations, but nevertheless known to host Bulgarian prostitutes, such as Great Britain, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Poland, the total estimate would be about 18-21.000 women.

This quantitative framework finds confirmation in unofficial estimates by the police of the number of procurers and pimps by town. In the large Bulgarian towns (with population of 50-100.000) where prostitution is weak in intensity, such as Pazardjik, the number of procurers is in the range of 100, and the number of prostitutes, about 300; in towns characterized by higher intensity, such as Sliven, there are about 500 procurers and 1.000 prostitutes. Based on these unofficial estimates for the 30 largest Bulgarian towns²⁰⁸ (more than 40.000 residents), the number of **prostitutes** would be **approximately 21-22.000**. If the 40 largest (more than 20.000 residents) towns²⁰⁹ are considered, their number can be estimated at **25.000**. Furthermore, at least 70-80% of these girls are believed to work abroad on a permanent or temporary basis. When using these police estimates it is important to take into consideration two opposing factors. The first one is that the police continue to take into account prostitutes and procurers who have left

²⁰⁶ See *Trafficking in Human Beings*, Fourth report of the Dutch National Rapporteur, Bureau NRM, The Hague 2005

²⁰⁷ In this estimate it is assumed that all of the victims of sexual exploitation sought help, which is hardly likely to be the case.

²⁰⁸ These towns manage to attract the girls ready to engage in prostitution from the smaller settlements.

²⁰⁹ According to official national statistics, the thirty biggest towns of the country have between them approximately 4.1 million inhabitants or 48% of the country's population; the respective figures for the forty biggest towns are 4.85 million or 56%.

the sex trade and thus the figures constantly increase with the addition of new people. The second factor works in the opposite direction. As a rule, at the local level, the police manage to get an idea of the lowest segment of the market – street and highway prostitution and the brothels, to some extent. They fail to take in the brothels whose owners pay bribes,²¹⁰ as well as the entire class of the elite prostitutes. However, the largest group escaping attention is made up by the girls who have directly started prostituting outside the country.

In addition to estimating the Bulgarian share in the market, trafficking victim data also make it possible to examine the evolution of export in time. It can best be described as having snow-balled over the years. It was found from the interviews with officials from domestic security institutions in the Netherlands and Belgium, as well as in Bulgaria, that after the initial establishment around 1993-95 of procurer base centers in Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary, and Austria, the activity gradually expanded, moving to the Netherlands and Germany,²¹¹ Italy and Spain, with the number of prostitutes increasing slowly yet steadily until the end of the 1990s. With the realization that the revenues from prostitution are times higher than in Bulgaria, there occurred a chain reaction, with procurer networks sending an increasing number of girls who had started prostituting in Bulgaria. A genuine snow-ball effect was observed in 2001-2003 after the lifting of Schengen visas in April 2001. These observations, as expressed in the interviews, find a most eloquent confirmation in the data from IOM and Germany on Bulgarian trafficking (the large number of cases guarantees data reliability).

The data from IOM and Germany's Federal Criminal Police Office, which cover longer periods of time, point to concurrent tendencies in human trafficking. The initial growth rate was almost 300% in 2001 and 2002 in Germany. After a peak in 2003, there was a downward trend. The same development was observed in 2001 and 2002 in Belgium and the Netherlands. As suggested by respondents from the main groups involved in Bulgarian export, the drop occurred because the recruiter networks and prostitutes had adapted to the new situation rather than a depletion of the sources of women and girls.

At the same time, the **Bulgarian participation in the prostitution market in the EU has undergone notable changes**. Whereas in the late 1990s, the typical Bulgarian prostitute in Western and Central Europe had previous experience in Bulgaria, in the new situation there is a veritable boom of participants without such experience. Moreover, prostitution is now found in all social groups wishing to emigrate and looking for steady or temporary jobs in the European Union – from maids and nurses to students at prestigious universities. What is more, short-term entry into the sex trade is so widespread that it is difficult to make even a rough estimate of this semi-professional periphery.

²¹⁰ See "I pay 15 grand a month"

²¹¹ As mentioned above, the first procurer structures formed around the networks of car thieves in Central Europe. After the German police cracked down on their organization in Germany, they moved on to Italy and Spain. The procurer networks followed.

Mass Prostitution outside the Country

The estimate of the number of prostitutes outside the country at 18-21.000 at least, raises a number of questions in view of the demographic characteristics of a country such as Bulgaria. Set against the number of Bulgarian citizens working and living abroad, these figures may seem rather paradoxical. Considering that an estimated 500.000 Bulgarians have been living abroad since 1990 (excluding those who moved to Turkey in 1989) and based on survey findings that 60-65% of that population are male, there are about 175-200.000 women living outside the country. This would mean that 9-12% of the female population abroad works in the sex industry. And if it is recalculated in terms of the female population aged 15-35, the percentage would be even more shocking. Naturally, the proportion is probably considerably smaller since about 30% of the prostitutes in Western and Central Europe live permanently in Bulgaria and another 40% come back regularly and are registered as permanent residents in their respective hometowns in Bulgaria. At the same time, if we consider the number of prostitutes in proportion to the general population, Bulgaria is by no means a country with exceptionally high share of prostitutes. **Based on the estimate of 25-30.000 prostitutes (including those practicing inside the country), 0.32-0.39% of the country's population would appear to be engaged in prostitution.**²¹² In comparative terms, in countries like Germany and the Philippines with about 400.000 prostitutes,²¹³ the proportion is 0.49% and 0.47%, respectively; in South Korea, for example, the 1.2 million engaged in prostitution represent as much as 2.45% of the population.²¹⁴ It should be borne in mind when comparing the data that in Western Europe the official estimates based on special government surveys are considerably lower. Thus, for instance, a survey by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs of 2000 reported 20-25.000 engaged in prostitution (with a population of 16.4 million, this means barely 0.12-0.15%); Austria officially estimated the proportion of prostitutes at 0.21% in 2003; Belgium, at 0.12-0.29%, etc. These official estimates, however, have been criticized as seriously understated by law-enforcement and academic institutions alike. The critics argue that the official estimates fail to take in the unregistered prostitutes, who represent a huge percentage. They do not seek legitimization since it would create family and professional problems once they decide to withdraw from the sex trade.

Nevertheless, the surveys in these West-European countries suggest that, on the one hand, these are data that do not concern illegal prostitution, which is estimated to be 3-4 times larger, and on the other hand, that 70 to 90% of those engaged in prostitution are foreigners.

To analyze the mass scale of prostitution in demographic terms it is necessary to use finer optics capable of magnifying the details. In this respect, **for the scale of Bulgaria, a town such as Sliven is a good example of the large provincial town model.** It is particularly suitable because of the publicly known facts concerning access to almost legal work in the sex windows in Brussels. In most other

²¹² According to the Bulgarian National Statistical Institute (NSI), the population numbered 7,679,290 in 2006. See <http://www.nsi.bg/Population/Population06.htm>

²¹³ See <http://www.hvdr-ev.org>

²¹⁴ "Sex Work in South Korea", Asia Monitor Resource Center. Accessed on February 10, 2006 (<http://www.amrc.org.hk/Arch/3309.htm>)

large towns, the export of prostitutes and work in the sex industry are part of a covered-up, non-transparent process and only criminal incidents may lead to occasional public disclosures. There are about 200-210 windows registered in Brussels, operating in two shifts. It is estimated that 90% of the girls come from Bulgaria and that 90% of the Bulgarians are from Sliven. In the opinion of Bulgarian and Belgian officers, this Bulgarian town has managed to take over the window prostitution in Brussels from the Albanian pimps owing to its specific and effective procurer organization. Based on the data on Sliven there emerges an interesting demographic framework of the prostitution phenomenon. The town has a population of 100,000, of whom roughly half are women. The number of girls and women aged 15 to 30 would thus be about 15-17,000. As noted above, the number of procurers is in the range of 400-500 and of prostitutes, 800 to 1,000. Therefore, one in 15-17 women is likely to be engaged in prostitution. If only those with "marketable looks" are considered, as the interviewed procurers put it, the proportion might reach 5-6 to 1. In addition, it should be noted that the prostitutes are no longer recruited from the socially disadvantaged sections alone. For example, there are hardly more than 30-40 prostitutes from the very large Roma ethnic minority in town (in excess of 20% of the population).

Unlike Sliven, in the other large towns it is usually the procurers with criminal records and the prostitutes from the low social strata that tend to be more transparent. Those registered with the police are typically girls of Roma origin, from socially disadvantaged families, from problem families, girls with deviant behavior before reaching legal age. The findings are that almost nothing is usually known about the procurers or prostitutes in their hometowns after they moved to another place. Most of the time, the local police officers know the tale told to family and friends. As a rule, when these persons return, they buy property in locations other than the ones where they used to live (except for those of Roma origin and the lowest social groups). In this context, if in a town such as Dobrich, Pazardjik, Vidin, or other with a population of 40-50,000, the police are aware of 300-400 women engaged in prostitution, this number does not include the persons from the middle social groups known to work elsewhere in Bulgaria or abroad.

If the proposed estimates are accurate, **the high rate of prostitution puts forth a number of social and criminological questions.** In the long history of prostitution there have been towns half of whose female population was engaged in prostitution. There are equally countries such as South Korea, Thailand, the Philippines, and some countries in Central America that nowadays have a high proportion of women engaged in prostitution compared to the general population. The question is how did Bulgaria, which in its modern history up to 1989 was a country with predominantly conservative mores and where prostitution used to be highly limited, end up with such mass-scale prostitution over a period of 16-17 years.

The analysis of the statistics on human trafficking suggests that the transition from a deviant and marginal occupation to the perception of prostitution as a "normal" job by average Bulgarians took place around 2000-2001. Up to 2001, prostitution abroad more or less passed through criminal channels, often directly or indirectly controlled by organized crime. Owing to the legal restrictions, leaving the country called for special efforts (securing legal or illegal documents), arranging

transportation, housing, residence permits, (with regular or false documents), etc., which was carried out through the well-developed market for criminal services. After the lifting of the Schengen visa requirements, however, the opportunity for **free access to the grey sector of the EU labor market without recourse to criminal middlemen eventually led to the discovery of the highly profitable European market for sex services.** According to the survey by the Women's Alliance for Development, 12-13% of those engaged in prostitution have higher education and 34%, secondary education.²¹⁵ This is a very different profile from the one of trafficking victims. The opportunity to earn €15-20,000 - versus a typical €1,000-2,000 for unskilled labor - is an incentive for 90-95% of the Bulgarian emigrants who left the country in large numbers in 2000-2003 and work in the lowest segment of the West European labor market. It is difficult to say exactly what transforms girl working as a babysitter, for instance, into a prostitute; or a young man working as a construction worker into a procurer. A specialized study would probably provide better answers to that question. What appears certain is that **in 2002, the models of Bulgarian prostitution abroad changed** - instead of girls who started prostituting in Bulgaria and were exported by club owners or procurers, the predominant model became the small and family business one and that of self-employment, with women who engaged in prostitution for the first time in the territory of the European Union.

Attributing the cause to the difficult Bulgaria transition and deep economic crisis is the most straightforward and common explanation but such a far-reaching social deformation calls for much more specific answers. Regrettably, most of the explanations that emerged in the course of the research drew on a limited number of interviews and a few journalistic investigations and analyses. Many of the factors seem to have acted conjointly in the period between the economic crisis of 1996-1997 and the lifting of the Schengen visa requirements. Below is an attempt to outline some of the more notable ones.

In the interviews conducted within the present study, the most commonly cited reason for entry into the profession (for both prostitutes and procurers) was **unemployment and the lack of income** to ensure even a minimal standard of living. This finds confirmation in the data on unemployment since 1990. Large sections of the population came under particularly hard pressure in the period 1998-2001. Up to 1997, the labor market reforms were slow-paced and radical job cuts were put off. It was only with the aggravation of the crisis under external influence, particularly on the part of IMF, that drastic layoffs and enterprise liquidations began. In comparison, whereas in the summer of 1996, the rate of unemployment was about 10%, by the spring of 2001 the unemployed had increased to 19.3%.²¹⁶ According to surveys by NGOs, the rate was even higher and exceeded 23.6%.²¹⁷ Moreover, the rise was not evenly distributed - in some regions of the country unemployment reached 30-40%. As an outcome of the radical and chaotic enterprise liquidation after 1997, a huge number of small settlements with only one or two enterprises were left without any employment opportunities while the big towns lost between half and two-thirds of the jobs.

²¹⁵ "Market for sex services on the rise...."

²¹⁶ The data are from the Employment Agency, see "<http://www.az.government.bg>"

²¹⁷ See *Early Warning Report*, January-February, 2001, UNDP.

A similar situation is found with respect to **income levels**. Bulgaria is probably the only country in Eastern Europe (except countries in armed conflict areas such as Serbia, Georgia, and Armenia) where household incomes shrank so drastically. By various estimates, in 1997 the average income was about 30% of the 1989 level. Even though in the late 1990s there were countries in Europe with lower average income (such as Albania, Moldova, and Ukraine), Bulgaria – in addition to ranking among the poorest European countries – was the one with the most dramatic drop in income.²¹⁸

The severe and long-lasting economic crisis had a grave impact on the fundamental institutions responsible for the socialization of children – the family and education.

In the period 1990-2003, the **Bulgarian family went through deeply destructive processes**. Whereas in the last pre-crisis year of 1989 the annual number of marriages was 63,000, by the late 1990s they had dropped to about 35,000 and in 2001-2002, to under 30,000 a year. In 1989, out-of-marriage births made up 11%. By 1995 they had reached 25.8%, in 2000, 38.4%, and in 2003, amounted to 46.1%.

A similar adverse impact of the economic crisis of 1996-1997 and the stagnation that followed in 1999-2001 was to be observed in secondary and higher education. Compared to the countries of Eastern Europe, in 1996-2000, Bulgaria had the highest school dropout rate among the 15-19 age group – about 38-39% on average, versus 16% in Poland and 19% in Hungary and the Czech Republic.²¹⁹ Surveys in that period found the average absentee rate in secondary schools to amount to about 20%.²²⁰ Data from international comparative studies on the state of secondary education conducted by UNESCO Institute for Statistics and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) suggest that Bulgaria was unique in terms of the drop in its education level.²²¹ According to the TIMSS survey, from ranking fifth in 1995 in science, Bulgaria fell to the 17th place in 1999 and ranked 24th in 2003. None of the 40 countries surveyed displayed a drop of such magnitude.²²² These data suggest that while it still had some inertial force in the first 3-4 years of the 1990s, the **secondary education system steeply deteriorated after 1996-1997**. Many of the respondents' accounts of their first experience with prostitution were associated with their high-school years precisely in that period.

Another aspect of the crisis in the Bulgarian family and society conducive to the mass spread of prostitution is the **lifting of the sexual inhibitions fostered by the traditional cultural and value system**. While it has long been known that Bulgaria's population is among the least religious in Europe, up to the end of the 20th

²¹⁸ The contrast is only comparable to some countries engaged in military operations, in the Caucasus and former Yugoslavia.

²¹⁹ "Education at a glance OECD Indicators", OECD, 2002; NSI.

²²⁰ See Kolvo Kolev, Andrey Raichev, Andrey Bundielov, *School and Social Inequality*, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Social Democratic Institute, 2000.

²²¹ *A Policy Note, Bulgaria – Education and Skills for the Knowledge Economy*, World Bank 2006, see also *Overview of Public Expenditures: Education - State, Problems, and Opportunities*, Ministry of Finance, 2004.

²²² See <http://nces.ed.gov/timss/>

century sexual mores still remained rather conservative. With the onset of the 1990s, the number of sexual partners rose sharply. One of the most commonly used indicators of these processes in the remaining East-European countries is the rate of syphilis infection. In the Czech Republic, for example, where the number of those engaged in prostitution is estimated at 10,000 to 25,000, a record-high increase was registered, from 1.6 per 100,000 population in 1990, to 13.7 per 100,000 in 2001. In comparison, there was talk of a syphilis epidemic²²³ in Bulgaria, with the rate of infection reaching 32.6 per 100,000 in 1998 from 4.3 per 100,000 in 1990. Even though Romania had a similar syphilis rate in 1998 – 34.7 cases per 100,000 population – the dynamics were less pronounced as the increase started from 19.8 cases per 100,000 in 1989.

With the end of Schengen visa restrictions in April 2001, Bulgarians wishing to work in the European Union gained a great tangible advantage over the rest of the Balkan states (in Romania, the visas were lifted nearly a full year later) and the former Soviet Union. **The record-high unemployment and extremely low income levels combined with access to the Schengen area in fact created the model of mass emigration.** Whereas in the preceding period, between 1991 and 2001, about 19,400 people left the country each year, in 2000-2003, the processes acquired the dimensions of a natural disaster with the average annual number of non-returning migrants to the EU reaching close to 100,000.

Even though the process of mass transition from job-seeking outside the country to prostitution and procuring remains unexplored in many respects, certain insights were gained from the interviews with respondents with first-hand experience. Poor education and the related lack of qualification came up against labor market constraints in the EU. Moreover, the Bulgarian short- and long-term emigrants were late to enter this market compared to those from Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, and the Baltic republics. These difficulties led a huge number of Bulgarian job-seekers to take up activities requiring little qualification and paying just as little.

It was established in the interviews that in the very period between 2000 and 2003, the sex trade offered times higher remuneration compared to unskilled jobs and proved an irresistible temptation in economic terms. The most commonly shared opinions accounting for this phenomenon cited as the main reason the **exceptionally high level and the security of the income.** These opinions were practically identical across the entire range, from the lowest segment of the market – Roma girls working in the streets of Italy and Southern France, to the high-end segment of prostitution in the Netherlands and Germany. To the Roma girls, "this is the best job for a Gypsy", "you make more money in a single day than in a whole month in Bulgaria", "you have more money than the neighborhood moneylender". The same was told by Bulgarian students working in two different Dutch cities as escorts: "The only really high-paying job accessible here is that of a prostitute". The other motive that often came up concerned the contrast between real consumption afforded by wages of low-skilled workers and the purchasing power that can be secured by prostitution. In the words of a girl who

²²³ Dencheva R; Spirov G; Gilina K; Niagolova D; Pehlivanov G; Tsankov N. "Epidemiology of syphilis in Bulgaria, 1990-1998," *International Journal of STD & AIDS*, Volume 11, Number 12, 1 December 2000, pp. 819-822

started prostituting after working 6 months as a cleaner in London: "When you don't need to spend weeks of dumb work to afford a decent piece of clothing, the humiliation is not that hard to live with."²²⁴

Many times this actually proves the only option for girls and women leaving the country without having secured employment in the EU where they are unable to get even unskilled regular jobs. Quite a few respondents also referred to the pressure of the environment when talking about the transition to prostitution. Typical stories include girls driven to prostitute themselves for fear of losing their jobs at restaurants, bars, shops, or even as assistant caregivers for children and elderly people. The above-mentioned lack of moral inhibitions owing to the crisis in the family and the education system, as well as the lack of religious feelings, no doubt facilitate the economically rational choice.

When trying to account for the growing Bulgarian share in the sex industry, one of the most significant factors is that the **Bulgarian infrastructure for the supply of sex services was already in place**. In 2000-2001, the procurer networks that were established in the mid-1990s had the capacity to take on the sharply increased supply. At times, the infrastructure of Turkish, Albanian, and Serb procurer networks in countries such as Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands is also used. These channels are accessible not only to Bulgarian citizens of Turkish ethnic origin, but also to Turkish-speaking Roma.

In addition to the domestic factors, it is also necessary to take into consideration the changing realities in the European Union. One of the most notable developments is the **sharp rise in demand for sex services in Western Europe**. In the largest market in Europe – Germany – in the beginning of the 1990s the number of those engaged in prostitution was estimated at 50,000 to 200,000,²²⁵ but current estimates are of 400,000 prostitutes serving 1.5 million customers on a daily basis.²²⁶ In Great Britain, the second largest market for sex services in Europe, it has been found that the turnover of the sex industry doubled between 1990 and 2000.²²⁷ It is revealing that the increase was not related to any noticeable reduction in the prices of sex services which would have indicated increased supply. The reasons for this phenomenon should be sought in a number of social, political, technological, geographical, and even pharmaceutical, factors influencing both the demand and the supply of sex services.

Possibly the most important change was related to the wave of **legislative amendments legalizing prostitution**. In the Netherlands, brothels became completely legal as of October 2000 and in Germany, the amendments were passed in 2002.

²²⁴ This view was repeated several dozen times by girls with different experience in the sex trade.

²²⁵ B. Leopold, E. Steffan, N. Paul: Dokumentation zur rechtlichen und sozialen Situation von Prostituierten in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Schriftenreihe des Bundesministeriums für Frauen und Jugend, Band 15, 1993

²²⁶ *German Prostitution Law Has Failed, No Reduction in Crime Through Improved Legal Status* by Wolfgang Polzer "http://www.spcm.org/Journal/spip.php?article5939"

²²⁷ A survey by Imperial College London covering 11 000 respondents established that, whereas in 1990 one out of 20 had paid for sex in the course of the year, by 2000 one in ten respondents had done so. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/4482970.stm>

With the gradual lifting of restrictions on workforce movement within the European Union, more and more people have been migrating in search for better-paid work. The accession of the new member countries from Central and Eastern Europe marked the culmination of this process.

As throughout human history, those seeking sex services are largely young men, who are not always able to take their families (if any) with them or to have a steady relationship with a woman in the host country. Higher demand can also be observed among another specific group – men over middle age. The members of this group are usually better off and the demonstration of sexual activity, mainly with young women, is often considered admirable among them. Until recently men over middle age had limited capacity to consummate the desired “goods”, not so much because of financial, but purely biological, constraints. The appearance in the market of the so-called erectile dysfunction medications (Viagra²²⁸ was followed by Levitra, Cialis, and other such pharmaceutical products) drastically increased their sexual activity and respectively, the demand for sex services.

Main Types of Prostitution Schemes

Engaging in prostitution independently – the “self-employed” work alone or in groups (usually of two or three) for their own profit and at their own risk. Up to 2002-2003, this model was considered risky, particularly in the low-end market segment (streets, parking lots, etc.) of sex services in Western Europe. It is more widespread among elite prostitutes but in the past 2-3 years has been growing more common, especially in export prostitution and among those who manage to obtain official work permits in the countries where prostitution is legal. This group may use the services of the procurer infrastructure – premises, transport, and even protection – and pay for these at negotiated rates.

Engaging in prostitution within a partnership. Procurers often agree with one or more girls to provide protection against customers and the local competition, to take care of the logistics of regular prostitution, to help overcome administrative barriers in the foreign country (work permits, medical security and other insurances), etc. Under this scheme, the prostitute pays a negotiated price for the service (either a percentage per transaction or a percentage of the daily, weekly, or monthly revenue). The business partners are often in an intimate relationship and it is not uncommon for them to be legally married.²²⁹ The one prostitute/one procurer model seems more widespread among girls coming from small or medium-sized towns in Bulgaria. These family businesses often operate in “friendly networks”, thus ensuring easy mobilization against the competition (incl. assembling punitive brigades, mobilizing large groups of 20-30 people demonstrating readiness to resort to violence), sharing of information and cooperation in overcoming bureaucratic obstacles in Bulgaria and the EU. They further ensure mobility upon emergence of better market opportunities or upon exiting high-risk markets and make joint investments (usually acquiring property in Bulgaria). Regarding the financial terms, the earnings are usually split between the procurer and the girl

²²⁸ The medication became accessible in Western Europe and USA in 1998.

²²⁹ Legal marriage offers a number of advantages in terms of legitimization before European court and law-enforcement authorities. The court is evidently less likely to believe that the husband is acting as a pimp for his wife and forces her to prostitute herself.

or girls fifty-fifty; so are the expenses. With procurers regarded as successful in the business, i.e. securing larger revenues, the proportion may reach as much as 70% for the procurer, with the expenses covered by the girl. The model where the parties are of unequal standing is more likely to involve abusive practices on the part of the procurer. On the one hand, he enjoys far greater power and control, as well as a competitive advantage - assured higher income compared to other procurers. Yet, under this scheme, the procurer also runs the risk of the girl putting an end to the disadvantageous relationship and even of her seeking assistance from law-enforcement authorities with all the ensuing consequences.

Engaging in prostitution as hired labor. The relations under this scheme, as in normal business, are those between an employer and an employee. The former may be an individual (procurer, bar owner, etc) or a legal entity (employment agency, transport company, entertainment establishment, massage parlor, etc). The formal or informal structure hires the prostitute and they negotiate the conditions of work outside the country, often in very vague terms. The employer ensures a place at an establishment in Western or Central Europe, protection, accommodation, transport, documents, etc. Payment follows the partnership model and may range from 10 to 90% for the girl, with the latter covering the expenses, as well. However, the most typical arrangement is 30-40% for the girl and 30-40% for the Bulgarian entrepreneur, with another 30% paid to the foreign partner.

The size of the enterprises may vary: from one girl, in which case this model hardly differs from the partnership scheme; through medium-sized structures with a staff of 3-4 workers; to the big procurer networks employing 10-15 girls. Sometimes there are as many as 40-50 girls and these rings often operate with the involvement of entrepreneurs.

3.4. ORGANIZED CRIME IN THE EXPORT OF PROSTITUTION

The market principles of operation in the export of prostitutes, the small family businesses, friendly networks and all of the other above-outlined schemes related to small-scale entrepreneurship do not mean organized crime is not involved in the export of these services. On the contrary – the mass Bulgarian presence in the high-profit markets for sex services in the EU is a priority area of activity for Bulgarian organized crime as it provides unparalleled revenues at minimal risk, judging by interviews with leading members of the Bulgarian criminal world.²³⁰ **prostitution, together with the real estate business are probably the most attractive markets at the present time, surpassing drug dealing, trafficking in goods, money forgery, etc.** The main problem facing the structures of organized crime is how to make sure they get regular and as high as possible income from those engaged in prostitution and their procurers. The task became all the more complicated once access to the European Union became practically free in 2001. Moreover, since 2003-2004, the internal security institutions of the EU have paid particular attention to human trafficking from Bulgaria and have generally managed to get increasing cooperation from the respective Bulgarian institutions.

²³⁰ This opinion was shared by 6 respondents who are among the best known car thieves in this country and one of the living bosses of a semi-criminal insurance company.

The interviewed respondents outlined different schemes describing the **forms of direct or indirect influence by organized crime**. As noted in the analysis of human trafficking, the involvement of organized crime is possible at all stages – from the recruitment of the girls, through the crossing of the borders, to organizing the sex service supply in the foreign country. The situation is similar as regards prostitution outside the country under all three organizational schemes (self-employment, partnership, and hiring), as well as at all three stages of organizing operations in the foreign markets (recruiting the girls, organizing access to the foreign market, and the actual supply of sex services). It is often extremely difficult to define where the line is between the selling of a service to voluntary prostitutes, small and family businesses, and the monopolistic control over certain areas of activity, the racket, etc. by organized crime. When considering the activity of Bulgarian organized crime in prostitution markets in and outside Bulgaria one finds many of the characteristics of the above-outlined three typologies of human trafficking. Depending on the specific town/region, there may be examples of the **hierarchical model** of varying complexity and scope; of the **natural resource model**, where the self-employed, the small and family businesses are treated as a resource or as goods; or of the **entrepreneurial model**, when the criminal bosses act as entrepreneurs at some or all stages. Unlike trafficking for sexual exploitation, however, there is hardly any coercion or violence. The prostitutes work to earn an income or pay members of organized crime in order to do so, all while considering it a matter of personal choice and a normal occupation.

There is but fragmentary information about the mechanisms of operation of Bulgarian organized crime outside the country. Even if it does not provide exhaustive answers about the inner workings of the mechanisms, it points to several important patterns.

- **European market distribution.** As in the domestic markets, the procurer networks distribute the posts, i.e. the workplaces in the EU market (whether streets, hotels, bars, windows, etc). Obtaining and controlling new posts is indicative of the power and influence of a given procurer. The comparative analysis of the data on the origin of those engaged in prostitution (registered and extradited; interviewees) found a number of Bulgarian towns/regions that appeared to cover corresponding towns/regions in Europe (as well as several US cities), such as:
 - **Pazardjik, Stara Zagora, and Haskovo** export girls to Austria, France, Germany;
 - **Plovdiv** exports girls to Italy, France, and Belgium;
 - **Sliven, Varna, and Bourgas** export to Belgium, Netherlands, Germany, France;
 - **Kvustendil, Pleven, Blagoevgrad, and Russe** export to Italy Spain, and Greece.

In addition to regional specialization, there appeared to be town-to-town affiliations over certain periods. For example, Sliven with Brussels, Dobrich with Mannheim, Gabrovo with Valencia, Varna with Lvov, etc.

Presumably, the underlying reason for such territorial distribution is that the locally established criminal structures in Bulgaria transferred their or-

ganization to the respective region in Western Europe. Moreover, procurer networks are probably only one part of the criminal city/regional networks. They trust the same girls as in the regions where they operated in Bulgaria and even help competitors with whom they negotiate prices and territory limits. One theory is that the regional partitioning of Europe is the outcome of the lessons learned in the early 1990s on how to avoid conflicts. As a rule, incidents (killings, fights, escaping girls, etc) lead to activation of law-enforcement and criminal justice institutions and draw the focus on Bulgarian procurer networks.

- **Communicating vessels.** In many respects, the partitioning of West-European territories is conditioned by the need to maintain constant communication with the towns/regions where the procurers come from. In fact, the European town/region in which a given procurer network is operating is like a reservoir connected to another one in the respective Bulgarian town/region. As the European reservoir fills up, the Bulgarian one dispenses. At the border checkpoints one sees hundreds of girls leaving (voluntarily) to work as prostitutes abroad. The reason for this flow is that, up to January 2007, the legal term of residence in the European Union was 3 months, after which they had to go back home and get replaced by a colleague waiting her turn in Bulgaria. Minivans shuttle back and forth on a regular basis, serving the scheme of three-month stays in the European Union. The level of organization is evident from the good coordination of the prostitute replacement schedules and the timetables of the minivans – with fixed departure and arrival times and locations (for example, leaving from a filling station in a town with a population of 50,000 in Northern Bulgaria and passing through 3-4 European cities in France and Spain). It should be noted that the Bulgarian reservoir is usually a large town or several small settlements which in turn are filled from other locations. The reason is the small size of Bulgarian towns (except for the four largest ones - Sofia, Plovdiv, Varna, and Bourgas), making any affiliation with procurer networks too visible to family and friends. That is why the reservoirs in Bulgaria work on an exchange basis, drawing prostitutes from other locations. During their required stay out of the European Union, the girls usually do not work in the Bulgarian domestic market, largely because it is very small (excepting Sofia, Varna, and the resort towns during the tourist season). This applies in particular to the new wave of prostitutes who entered the profession after the end of the 1990s. A considerable proportion of these girls have not had any previous experience in Bulgaria and do not try to work here.
- **Specialization.** One of the chief arguments in support of the conclusion that the export of prostitution is organized crime, is the highly specialized and decomposed nature of the process. There exist certain functions, some of them modifications of the functions identified in human trafficking (in fact, the same individuals may operate in both systems). The main roles are:
 1. **'New flesh hunter'** – a person recruiting girls in Bulgaria. It is the same type of role as in trafficking but with the export, the job offer makes it quite clear that the work involves prostitution (even if it is not only

prostitution). The recruitment of girls has been the object of many criminological studies in Western Europe and USA, yet none at all have been conducted in Bulgaria to date. This model includes various schemes. The first one is related to having the girl selected (referred to as "fresh meat") go through the Bulgarian domestic market first, i.e. she is not exported immediately but undergoes training in Bulgaria for a few months at least. Given the new opportunities, however, prostitution in Bulgaria pays far less and the stay in the country is considered loss-making. In the past few years, direct export has been an increasingly common practice. The second one involves recruiting the girls ("the hunt") in the respective European country where they are working or studying. There, chances are far greater for a woman to find herself in a critical situation (lack of money, losing a job, housing problems, indebtedness, administrative problems with the authorities, petty crime charges, etc.) and this considerably facilitates recruitment. Under both schemes, the "hunter" simply needs to appraise correctly the financial and psychological problems. He may not have to do anything about the recruitment but only to transmit the information. In this process, the procurer is of key importance – he is also the chief exporter. With more primitive networks, the hunter and the procurer are one and the same person. It is common practice in the low-end segment (street and highway prostitution) for the prostitutes to be sold by one procurer to another, with their price in Western Europe being twice as high as in Bulgaria. With family businesses and small businesses the selection and hiring of the girl (partnership) are carried out by the same person, who also takes on all of the roles and pays for the services within the system.

2. **'Mules'** – guides who take them to the respective country, usually by minivans, in which case they are often the drivers, but sometimes by regular coach lines when the guides accompany the girls. If the drivers work for some large structure they may provide the service for a fee to family and small businesses.
3. **Procurer** – the person who picks up the girls upon arrival and assigns them to the prostitution locations agreed in advance. This role may also involve provision of services to small businesses and offering posts to new market entrants.
4. **Supervisors** ('Madam', 'first girl') – these are usually promoted prostitutes watching how much money each girl working for a given procurer network is making, whether she reports all her earnings, if she is making unauthorized calls, if she has any risky customers (through whom she might get away from the business) and so on; they further keep an eye on the profits of the small businesses so as to fix the right rate of payment ("criminal rent").
5. **Money carrier.** It is characteristic of the Bulgarian sex trade abroad that the money earned is returned to Bulgaria. There are several ways of sending the money to the bosses. In the 1990s, the most customary one was to use the drivers of the cars, minivans and buses (including drivers and attendants on regular coach lines between foreign countries and

Bulgaria) or trusted girls who come back after a fixed time. The most common method is still the use of the international money transfer system Western Union where the sender remains anonymous. In turn, the bosses to whom the money is sent usually use related financial houses and currency exchange offices that do not record the identity of the recipient and thus all of the persons involved remain unidentified. The more sophisticated networks may even have a financial team organizing and changing the repatriation and laundering schemes through various financial institutions.

7. **Investor(s)/legitimizer(s).** These are often trusted businessmen and lawyers responsible for investing and legalizing the repatriated funds. Depending on the size of the structure, they may serve one or more organizations. There are instances of perfectly legitimate accounting and legal firms that are actively involved in this process. "Small businesses" may be offered participation in an advantageous investment against a percentage or as a favor (for the rent).
8. **The Boss.** At the very top of the organization, the boss is based in Bulgaria and controls the other participants in the scheme. In addition to the prostitutes exported by him, he may also get protection racket for prostitutes and procurers in the respective region in Bulgaria. The boss is often engaged in other businesses, legal as well as illegal (e.g. trafficking in drugs and in stolen cars).

The described mechanisms in many respects predetermine the structure and manner of functioning of the foreign market for sex services. The **evolution undergone by Bulgarian organized crime towards small loosely connected networks does not mean that the former hierarchical structures are gone**. They may be smaller but they still exist and depend on more or less well-known emblematic figures (former members of semi-criminal rings, local and national oligarchs).

With this type of **hierarchies**, the man on the top has a perfectly legal business and is not concerned with day-to-day operations. The formal owner or manager of the European business with prostitutes is often one of the trusted associates. He is authorized to manage a certain number of girls himself, to keep records of the payments by smaller entrepreneurs gravitating toward the structure, and to collect the protection racket from the small independent businesses. Prostitution – domestic and international – is typically just one of the areas of activity covered. This type of hierarchies work as holdings of legal and grey sector companies, which essentially deliver services – from transport to housing. Judging from the interviews conducted within the present study, as well as press publications, many shadowy bosses already appear to have acquired hotels, entertainment establishments or shares in such ventures in the West-European countries where they operate. In the different towns and regions, there appear to be **three different models of operation**. In the biggest cities, such as Sofia, Varna, Plovdiv, and Bourgas, and in some smaller towns in Southwest Bulgaria, these structures control the market – street prostitution, brothels, modeling agencies, and through them, the procurers exporting girls. The small and family businesses usually find ways to secure protection for themselves, often unaware of who exactly is provid-

ing it. In the smaller towns, they control the major procurers and through them, part of the procurer networks. The third model is related to direct ownership by the big local bosses. Some may have as many as 40-50 girls working for them,²³¹ who are sent to different European cities.

The most typical and widespread model, however, is that of the **networks**, with dozens of procurers coming together for protection, usually on the basis of the town/region they come from. This model proved highly effective in the mid-1990s against the already dominating structures of organized crime in Western and Central Europe grouped by nationality – Albanian, Serb, and Turkish ones, as well as the aggressive Russian, Ukrainian, and Caucasian newcomers. These structures tend to escape the attention of West-European law-enforcement because they appear as a chaotic group of Bulgarians lacking the characteristics of organized crime. With this model, all the members are seemingly equal, regardless of how many girls a procurer has.

A number of facts, however, give reason to assume that these are not typical networks of equal partners. Some of them are known to be backed by some obscure structure whose top levels are found in Bulgaria (or a third country where the Bulgarian bosses feel safe enough). As already mentioned, the degree of specialization is quite high and a system of internal subordination is in place (some roles rank higher and/or are more independent than others). The top ranks are usually at the town/regional level. Thus, for instance, in Sofia, there are 10; in Varna - 4; in Bourgas - 3; in Sliven - 3, etc. There exist big bosses and less independent ones. Their chief role is to make sure their networks are well-protected. The security of Bulgarian territory (the Bulgarian "reservoir") is ensured precisely by the paid protection of the big bosses. This means that each pimp pays his dues to the local town bosses. If an independently working prostitute, family- or small business do not participate in the region-based or friend network in the respective European city, with the never-ending conflicts with competing prostitutes and procurers they run the risk not only of being pushed out of the market but of exposure to violence against which they have no recourse. Their vulnerability with respect to both foreign ethnic networks and Bulgarian ones force the freelancers to seek cooperation with already established Bulgarian procurer networks. It is common practice for independent prostitutes to be denounced to the police not only by anonymous reports, but also by false testimonies (subsequently withdrawn) in order to drive them out of the local market.

In addition to protection abroad, the bosses also provide security inside the country. Various instruments are known to exist for **neutralizing the representatives of law and order** – from VIP member cards for classy brothels, through paying for their children's education, taking on the mortgage payments, to the funding of offshore accounts. Probably the best illustration of police support, centrally and locally, are the cases of detention and extradition. The comparison of the police databases on two West-European countries only, reveals hundreds of cases of extradited girls who go back within days of their extradition. Another practice is to change the name or even a single letter in the name of the person in question, which can be done even without the knowledge of the security authorities.

²³¹ The Plovdiv rapper Vanko-1 is probably the most notorious example of such a personal structure.

but the speed at which this happens indicates a smoothly working system connected to many and different levels of power. In the past 5-6 years, the public has learnt about instances of senior prosecutors (in Russe) and judges (in Pleven and Peshtera) connected to notorious procurers. In any case, those at the very top adhere to the **fundamental principle of mutual interest and economic benefit**. Everyone in these large, loosely structured organizations is participating because it allows them to work. Starting with the girls, who know they would be exposed to high risk on their own, both in terms of other procurers and the police, to the investors, who are getting huge amounts – for the scale of Bulgaria – of “hot” money. It should not be ignored that the instruments of violence are inevitably present in this market. In peaceful times, the small bosses usually hire one driver and one bodyguard but when the tension rises there may be as many as ten. The typical approach is to hire persons with criminal records who are used to execute punishments, provide protection, etc. In this type of structures there is far more subordination but the underlying principle remains that of mutual interest.

There is likewise a **hybrid form** in between the networks and the hierarchies. It involves several dozen girls and several dozen procurers but the top level is occupied by a kind of syndicate including various influential figures on the local level. Unlike the towns/regions, where there are 1-3 big bosses and about a dozen small ones, this type of syndicate takes control over the entire local market, including the resorts and export.

3.5. PROSTITUTION IN BULGARIA: THE SIZE OF THE MARKET AND EXPECTED TRENDS

3.5.1. Tentative Estimate of the Prostitution Market

The estimate of the prostitution market in Bulgaria is based on official data on the practicing prostitutes in the country and the mean rates charged.

For the purposes of the estimate, it is assumed that in Bulgaria a prostitute on average works 20 days a month. It is further estimated that club prostitutes see three customers a day and since their average rate is 50 leva,²³² one girl makes 150 leva a day or 3000 leva a month. A club usually has 4 to 8 girls, meaning that a brothel's takings amount to 900 leva per day or 18,000 leva per month.

With street prostitution, where the daily target is typically 100 leva, the calculations show that one girl's takings average 2,000 leva per month.

Based on MoI data,²³³ according to which the number of prostitutes in Bulgaria is 4,611 (even though it is far greater in the opinion of most of the respondents), the total monthly revenue of the prostitution market in this country can roughly be estimated at 9 to 14 million leva at the minimum. Its annual turnover is thus

²³² This average rate does not take into account the latest developments of the Fall of 2006 when an attempt was made to raise prices to 50-70 leva an hour in some of the big cities in the country.

²³³ *Trud* daily, May 31, 2003

in the range of **at least 110-170 million leva**. This amount does not include resort and border-region prostitution, nor the telephone lines/websites for ordering under-aged girls as these are extremely difficult to quantify. According to experts with the Ministry of Interior, a **conservative estimate** would be at least 30% higher than the above-cited higher figure, i.e. about **230 million leva**.

According to most surveys and the information collected, a prostitute's monthly takings abroad amount at the very least to €5,000-10,000 per month. Thus, if our minimum estimate of 18,000 prostitutes is accurate, it follows that Bulgarian prostitutes abroad make a total of €90 to 180 million per month or between €900 million and 1.8 billion per year. With this estimate it is assumed that the prostitutes work 300 days per year on average, i.e. due to visa restrictions, they stay outside the European Union for two months each year. By expert opinions, **about one-fifth of the money is repatriated to Bulgaria, i.e. between €180 and 360 million per year**. This minimum estimate represents a mean value including the low-paid street prostitution. However, the conservative estimate of the revenues from sex services has been criticized on the grounds that the situation has changed radically and the Bulgarian prostitutes in the low-end segment no longer make up such a large proportion as in the 1990s. First of all, they have adapted and have moved up to the middle segment of the sex services market in Western Europe. Secondly, as already noted above, unlike the period up to 2001, when mostly girls from the lowest social strata were involved and used to practice mainly in the streets and in cheap hotels, in recent years, all social groups have been represented – including university graduates – and operate in the high-end segments of the market. In view of these considerations, their monthly takings are more likely to be in the range of €15-20,000 or higher. Thus, following the above method of calculation, the annual revenue earned by those engaged in prostitution abroad may well exceed € 3 billion. In terms of the country's GDP in 2006, **even with the conservative estimate of €900 million-1.8 billion, this would constitute 3.6 to 7.2% of GDP** (with a GDP of €25.1 billion). In comparison, a similar proportion is reported in South Korea, where the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family estimated the South-Korean market at \$22 billion or 4% of the country's GDP.²³⁴

3.5.2. Trends in the Prostitution Market

The described structures and functioning of the domestic and foreign markets of the sex trade in many respects provide a static picture of the state of Bulgarian prostitution. Yet the processes in this country have been evolving dynamically after 2001 and since the accession to the European Union in January 2007, many of the outlined characteristics and mechanisms have been undergoing changes, even as the present study was still in progress.

The tendencies observed in the period 2004-2006 could be described as contradictory and of unforeseeable consequences. First of all, **after the European market for sex services opened up (2000-2002), the export of girls reached record-high**

²³⁴ "Comfort woman before and after Japanese rule—Korea's sex industry", "A Youthful Mistake", Meredith May. The San Francisco Chronicle, October 8, 2006. Second of a four-part series. Accessed on October 27, 2006.

levels and in all segments of the domestic market the number of those practicing prostitution began to fall. Whereas the late 1990s were marked by full clubs with 10-12 girls on average (and as many as 40 in the big clubs), in the past few years, the average number of girls has dropped to 5-6. By police data, a considerable proportion of the registered street and highway prostitutes are no longer in the country. According to NGOs engaged in the area of HIV/AIDS risk reduction among prostitutes, in 2006, a large number of the girls had had administrative restrictions imposed on their stay in the European Union, known as "black stamps". It is the main reason keeping them in this country.

At the same time, the data point to rising domestic demand for sex services, particularly in the biggest cities of the country. The reasons are both the increased purchasing power of the population and the double-figured growth of the number of foreign tourists since 2001. As a result, there has been a pronounced trend of increasing prices.

The second factor, acting in the opposite direction and pointed out in the section on the export of prostitution, is related to the **mass-scale development of the sex trade**. In addition to the above-outlined internal and external channels for recruiting prostitutes, there has emerged a new process, which in the opinion of market participants and police officers, has been acquiring epidemiological dimensions in the past 3-4 years. It is the boom in **amateur and semi-professional prostitution**. Without going into the preconditions,²³⁵ or its actual scope, it is possible to distinguish two basic patterns of involvement. The first one consists in accepting offers for paid sex of varying intensity – from 1-2 a month to 2-3 times a week, which may involve benefits other than cash compensation in the form of additional consumption,²³⁶ i.e. gifts, payment of bills, etc. The second pattern, which has been gaining increasing popularity, comes closer to the Asian model known as the "second wife". This model is often practiced with more than one client (except in the case of a very rich client or low intensity of prostitution). The number of partners usually ranges between 3 and 5. Various configurations are possible under this scheme – it may be a relatively closed one comprising several clients and several, partnering or competing, girls. There also exist open schemes comprising core customers and girls and peripheral customers and girls. Under this form of prostitution, too, the compensation may consist in covering rent or utility bills, cell phones, cars, trips abroad, etc. In between these two, there exist hybrid forms where in addition to the regular partners the girls see incidental customers, too.

Under both schemes, access to customers generally takes place outside the existing channels for professional paid sex services despite the efforts of various sex entrepreneurs to take advantage of the mass invasion of the sex trade by the new

²³⁵ The explanation could probably include a number of preconditions, starting with various socio-economic factors, through the lifting of certain socio-cultural limitations, to the reduced violence and control of the domestic market by the procurer networks. Similarly to the phenomenon of switching from regular work or study to prostitution, observed in the European Union, the boom of amateur and semi-professional prostitution is completely unexplored in this country.

²³⁶ A survey conducted by MBMD on commission from the Bulgarian Center for Gender Studies reveals that girls generally do not see any difference between payment for sex and gifts by men, see *Duma* daily, "Bulgarians Tolerant to Paid Love", 11 April, 2006..

type of participants. Typically, the **amateurs and semi-professionals find clients through their own social networks** (friends, acquaintances, other customers) and in places offering easy access to the right social groups, such as bars and clubs, hairdressing salons, and even specialty stores.²³⁷ Undoubtedly, however, the fastest-developing sector for attracting new customers is the internet where competition with the professional networks has been growing noticeably fiercer.

Amateur and semi-professional prostitution appears to have **two distinctive characteristics**. The first one is the **freedom to choose and respectively, to refuse** customers. The second one is the **absence of regularity in service delivery**. The customer cannot expect to get the same service over an extended period of time. It is worth noting that most of the women appear to withdraw from the business temporarily or permanently within 1-2 years. They typically perceive the services they provide as a temporary occupation. Many of the respondents living in Bulgaria and abroad said they were going to leave the business once they complete their education, pay off their apartment, car, loan, etc. Similar exit strategies are common among the professional prostitutes as well, but judging from the available empirical information, they are considerably less likely to be put to practice.

Another pronounced characteristic of both professional and semi-professional prostitution is the blurred boundary between more regular occupations and prostitution. Similarly to the Asian model, it is hard to tell at what point the waitress, sales girl, nurse, or person with some other occupation involving interaction with customers, crosses the line from normal service delivery to paid sex services.

The third factor, which is likely to radically change Bulgarian prostitution in the future, is the advancement of new technologies related to the use of internet and some GSM technologies. As a result of the fast expansion of the access to internet, since 2003-2005 there have appeared numerous websites for sex services and various smart solutions for the offer of paid sex through chat forums, search engines, online video servers, etc. In this context, it would seem that communication technologies provide a good opportunity to overcome the moral stigma, particularly among the older generation. Up to now, the sex service supply and demand have been very difficult to conceal in the Bulgarian environment (possibly with the exception of the one-million city of Sofia). In a country where family and friendly networks dominate everyday life, a visit to a brothel can hardly go unnoticed. At the same time, the discrete schemes of seeking prostitutes or customers are limited by the technical imperfections of the means of communication (ads in specialized media) or require the presence of well-paid middlemen. In this respect, the internet offer unlimited opportunities for the anonymous search and offer of sex services – a fact that greatly reduces the moral cost of involvement in such activities. The **adoption of the new technologies not only facilitates amateur and semi-professional prostitution**, but also allows the professional prostitutes in the **middle segment** to sidestep the owners of brothels and clubs and **directly solicit customers**. The response of the owners was to use the internet with active advertising of their brothels and escort services. What is more, after 2005 and in 2006 in particular, there was a great deal of investment in the creation of specialized products such as internet dating sites.

²³⁷ In this respect there are some remarkable similarities with Asian practices where even coffee shops prove efficient places for soliciting clients.

online search for "one-time or regular sex", having prostitutes owned by brothels intentionally enter dating chat rooms, forums, etc. These new forms of prostitution deliberately seek to blur the distinctions between sex with casual partners, online porn services, and paid sex.²³⁸

However, to the online sex entrepreneurs the chief interest lies in opportunities outside Bulgaria. It is worth noting that an increasing number of Bulgarian paid companions in the largest sex markets in Western Europe are offered through hybrid virtual online services – internet servers combined with a well-coordinated system using Bulgarian drivers to bring and guard the girls and to collect the money from the customers. The new technologies make it possible to penetrate the sex service markets in European countries where prostitution is legal but the access to windows, legal brothels, clubs, etc., is deliberately highly restricted or too expensive for Bulgarian sex entrepreneurs. These limitations can be overcome with the new technologies, moreover without breaking the law of the respective country. All internet or call orders are processed through servers and telephone exchanges located in different countries with suitable legislation and the services delivered are passed off as Internet services. Each investigation of such international schemes and attempts by the police to counter the materialization in reality of this virtual grey market ultimately come up against complex legal cases. Owing to the as yet limited scope and the invisibility of this market, law-enforcement and criminal justice authorities in Western Europe tend to avoid this dark zone.

The impact of the new communication technologies and the escalation of prostitution into a mass occupation coincide with the new opportunities opening up before this country with its accession to the European Union. Travel to and from Bulgaria has been greatly facilitated with the abolition of the internal borders and in addition, the country signed the open sky agreement, which has resulted in the rapid expansion of low-cost airlines. As a result, the cost of traveling to Bulgaria has become comparable to inter-city travel in Western Europe. In view of the mass construction of tourist facilities in the period 2001-2006, **sex tourism** can be expected to **start competing with the export of prostitution** as a business. Bulgaria already has a certain tradition in this type of service delivery in Southwest Bulgaria.²³⁹ According to entrepreneurs in the sex industry, importing customers

²³⁸ There exist various models and what is common to them all is the use of popular sites to meet people and eventually propose paid sex. It is sometimes difficult to tell apart the use of ordinary social networks where voting by SMS leads to a rise up a ranking and respectively, generates income for the owners of the website; or where one is dealing with a paid chat with interactive sexual content; or finally, where entering a virtual club means access to real paid sex. At present, there is reason to claim that the sphere of the virtual/real is an almost unexplored and non-transparent zone. What are the methods of selecting the persons to whom propositions are made; to what extent this is a system using traditional statistical methods familiar from advertising to monitor which pages the consumers are viewing, whom they are talking to, etc.; whether the whole process is still in a chaotic and primitive phase; these and many more questions are still difficult to answer. Revealingly, there is hardly any major free torrent server without advertisements of paid sex services from Bulgaria.

²³⁹ In the mid-1990s, agricultural producers from northern Greece became the first organized sex tourists in the winter season. As a result, towns of a population of 30,000 such as Sandanski and Petrich turned into major Greek destinations for sex tourists, where they are served by several hundred girls. In the past 5-6 years, similar specialization has been taking place in the largest towns of the country, with companies organizing charter flights with male passengers only: advertising 'escort services by female students' in foreign specialized sites, etc.

is a better option than exporting girls. The risks are significantly lower owing to the possibility of influencing the Bulgarian law-enforcement and criminal justice authorities and the daily expenses (accommodation, food, etc.) are considerably smaller, as well. In illustration of the competitive economic advantages of the import of sex tourists comes the fact that Bulgarian prostitutes actually prefer to offer paid sex close to the Greek border rather than in Greece itself. There is reason to predict that, if part of the tourist industry should decide to try and boost hotel occupation rates during the off-season, with the cheap flights, the Bulgarian seaside, mountain and particularly spa resorts stand to become serious competitors to the Prague and Budapest hotels specializing in sex tourism.

Box 5. Trends in the prostitution market

In view of the above-outlined recent trends in Bulgarian prostitution on the national and international level, and given the current legal framework, it is possible to formulate the following forecasts in the short and medium term:

- Prostitution will continue to be a priority area of activity to organized crime groups in Bulgaria;
- With the accession to the European Union, the export of Bulgarian prostitutes to member countries will most probably increase;
- New channels and destinations for the export of prostitutes are likely to emerge;
- Organized crime structures will seek specialization in a variety of sex tourism schemes;
- Mutual penetration and interaction between local and international organized crime structures will be intensifying;
- Efforts to launder profits from prostitution and to invest them in the legal economy can be expected to step up;
- Prostitution is likely to remain associated with other criminal activities;
- Prostitution practices will continue to be covered up under the guise of legal business activities;
- Sex exploitation of under-aged girls is not likely to end soon;
- The problem with Roma prostitution will persist and probably worsen;
- Unless the current legal framework is amended, police counteraction capacity will remain highly limited.