

International Conference on “Human Trafficking: A Threat to Family Values”

Parliament of Romania, organized and co-sponsored by the Chamber of Deputies, the Senate, as well as the European Christian Political Movement and the Federation of Catholic Family Associations in Europe (FCFAE)

Bucharest, Houses of Parliament, 2. April 2014



On April 2, 2014, under the overall themes, “Combating trafficking of persons”, and” Strengthening healthy family values”, the Romanian Parliament hosted and co-sponsored an international conference with the participation of many Romanian Government officials, Deputies and Senators, as well as known international personalities from various backgrounds. The venue was at the majestic “Palace of the People” a legacy of the late Romanian Dictator Nicolae Ceaucescu that is currently used as the main building of the Romanian Chambers of Parliament.

The President of the Chamber of Deputies, Mr. Valeriu ZGONEA, opened the meeting referring to the need for action against this modern days form of slavery. Romania provides a good part of the human resources (victims) that allow that trade to flourish in Europe. This has been aggravated by western influence and the difficult current social and economic situation and the continuous breakdown of families. Many youth and children have been left unattended and are exposed to temptations by criminal organizations and human traffickers.

1st. Plenary Session on “Human Trafficking” seen in the larger picture.

The first plenary session dealt with the problem of Human Trafficking in Europe. This affects Romania directly as many trafficked persons in Europe originate from Romania and other European countries with similar circumstances. Generally there is a tendency that persons from the east and south-east part of Europe are trafficked to the Western part of Europe. Because of the Schengen agreements there is very low visibility and thus very little control.

The President of the Chamber of Deputies addressed the audience with some specific details about the situation in Romania. He pointed out that the problem of trafficking is mainly that unattended, youth and unemployed young people are being lured into a possible “job” in more wealthy parts of Europe and the

Schengen Zone, notably to Holland, Germany, but also Switzerland, Austria etc. They are promised opportunities to make big money quickly. Minors, even at the age of 14-16 are being proposed “jobs” in entertainment and domestic services, only to find themselves ending up in the “Multi-Billion” Sex-industry of Western Europe, including prostitution and other forms of exploitation. Many youth and children of Romania, become Western Europe’s “Modern Day Slaves”, being exploited by organized crime groups and international agents for Human Trafficking.



Even though the title of the conference aimed to explain that trafficking in people poses a threat to Family Values, the various presentations actually showed clearly that things can be seen in the opposite way as well. That is, family breakdown, combined with economic instability, is providing the best ground for this shameful criminal activity.

Georgeta Gavrila, current Prefect of Bucharest explained that the problem of Human Trafficking has to be seen in light of the current crisis of family values. The evil in modern civilizations is that short sighted policies kill marriage and family. Abortion and things like adultery are taboos. Who is respecting Gods words these days? Anti-values are rampant, like divorce which is actually a failure of marriage. As a result, cohabitation becomes a new fashion, as a substitute for marriage.

Large faith based family organizations were among the co-sponsors of the Conference, like the FAFCE. It’s President, **Antoine Renard**, stated that love is a key word for our existence. Trafficking is a frontal attack against the dignity of any human being. The Family is the place where human dignity is transmitted to children and people. FAFCE is an NGO in consultative status towards the Council of Europe. FAFCE thinks that the Family is the best NGO to protect the children against trafficking.

Leo van Doesburg, Director, European Affairs and Policy Advising, ECPM, deplored the point of the current erosion of family values in Europe in general, and stressed the need for Governments to strengthen Marriage and Family as the best way to protect the children against trafficking.

The Romanian Government represented by **Min. Mihnea Cosmin Costoiu**, Delegate Minister for Education, Scientific Research and Technology, explained that the Romanian Government has made great efforts in taking on this situation in Romania. “It must be constantly stated that the family as such is the basic unit of our society, the beginning of all, and very important for us. Family is the vector for development” He went on to say, I’m not saying that only as a minister, but as a Father”. Family in a more and more complicated society is an even more important element, especially in coping with the troubles that many contemporary citizens

are being subjected to. In terms of exposing and eradicating human trafficking, family is also a key factor because of its educational function.

One could notice that Romania apparently finds herself coming under great pressures mainly from the EU and the western countries, which seemed to be very contradictory. The West/EU is strongly critiquing Romania for “providing” the “raw materials” for trafficking and urging them to take stronger measures. While at the same time, encouraging Romania to adopt new legislation for a continuous dismantling of “traditional family values” and pushing for more progressive marriage and family legislation (like the “Marriage for all” idea) with loose partnerships of cohabiting partners, thus weakening the “traditional family”.

The majority of the attending local deputies, senators and even government ministers, seemed to be strongly opposed to this kind of move, as they see these developments as counter-productive and creating more social chaos, more unattended children without sufficient parental care. The proposed changes in family laws from the West, even in terminology from “Father and Mother” to “Parent 1 & Parent 2”, therefore didn’t find much sympathy by the local audience. They feel the new terminology as strange, unnatural and artificial. Romania has a project to follow the pattern of Croatia to make a clear constitutional amendment, whereby Marriage can only be between a “Man and a Woman” and the fundamental right of children to have their “Father and Mother” would be constitutionally guaranteed.

It became evident that the Romanian Government plans to strengthen the “traditional family”. **Mr. Valeriu ZGONEA** said the following in his opening speech: “The conference promotes the strengthening of traditional values, and in the first place the strengthening of the family as the basic cell of society as a stronghold against the recruitment of persons for trafficking and as an instrument of rehabilitation of the victims.”

Unlike in the western part of Europe, it seems that in the east there is a greater awareness about the great contribution of the family to the wellbeing of all, and the need for governments to strengthen and support healthy family structures. Western governments are sometimes perceived as hypocritical, as they emphasize policies promoting human rights and human dignity and in the same time destabilizing the social fabric of new and emerging EU-member states like Romania and others.

2. Plenary session “Family Values and Marriage”

In the second plenary session, the values of Marriage and Family were more thoroughly debated by the presenters. The chair of the Plenary was taken on by **Ms. Maria Hildingsson**, Secretary General of FAFCE. Various personalities from civil society, including representatives of FAFCE, ECPM and others, lawyers working with the European Courts of Human Rights in Strasbourg, as well as NGOs, from Romania and other parts of Europe presented their views on the current situation of the family in Romania and Europe. They asked what effect this did have on the issue of “Human Trafficking”.

Ms. Florica Chereches, current Member of Parliament of Romania, and mother of four, stressed the importance of Family Values as a definition of marriage between a man and a woman. She informed that in Romania, the process is on the way for marriage to be registered in the Constitution as “between a Man and a Woman”. She argued that a child will never call his/her parents “parent a or parent b”. A few years ago she thought that the definition of marriage and family were self-evident truths. But in the last years seemingly things became more confused in Europe and the West.



Mr. Antoine Renard, President of FAFCE said that any society who thinks of the future has to care for their young people. Young people seemed to be more and more dissatisfied with the current situation of marriage and family. The family is the only place where people can learn to love, by being loved first. Family is this place where one can find self-esteem because you are loved just by being yourself, unconditionally.

France's Justice Minister had wanted to pretend that the Catholic Church’s view of the family is just their own view. However a survey with 6000 persons showed the change of behaviors among the generation between 6-29 of age.

They want most a life-long marriage relationship and they respect most parents who could give them an ideal and a vision of the future. France’s attempt to put a legalistic definition of the “Family” is a wrong approach. It shouldn’t be just considered as a legal issue. The centrality of marriage between a Man and a Woman and the Family are self-evident truths, because everyone is born of a Father

and a Mother. We should speak about Family virtues, and pressure the government to put the right definition into the Constitution.



Two outstanding personalities from Europe presented the situation of the debate about the family in their own countries and latest developments there. Those personalities were **Ms. Ludovine de la Rochère**, President of “Manif pour tous”, Paris – France and **Dr. Zeljka Markic**, President of the Association “In the Name of the Family”. (Organization that brought about the Croatian Referendum and a Constitutional Amendment for Marriage as being between a “Man and a Woman”.)

Both presentations showed the power of democracy, proclaiming their disagreement when being told by their Government what values they should believe in.

The “Manif pour tous” demonstrations in France showed the views of its citizens, ordinary people, who cherish healthy family values and are strongly opposed to the new “cultural revolution” introduced by the current French Government. Democratic Governments and legislators should listen and be in touch with the feelings and sensitivities of the population, especially in matters that concern everyone from the first moment of life, the “Family”. Both presenters emphasized that there shouldn’t be any careless social engineering with issues as fundamental as the family.

Croatia initially intended to change their constitution to adopt current “western European” tendencies about marriage and family legislation. But a courageous lady, medical doctor, and social activist managed to bring about a Referendum that changed the initial intentions of the Croatian Government to give in to European pressure, and had them register in the country’s Constitution marriage as between “A Man and a Woman”.

The courage of those ladies were applauded by the audience, even some enthusiastic conference participant called them “**Modern Day Joan’s of Arc/ Jeanne’s d’Arc**”.

The final and concluding 3. Plenary, was more focused on the Romanian situation itself and the application of the discussed conference contents. There was a strong impression that Europe’s influence is going to be crucial. Is Europe asking Romania to do things according to the (Western-) European view of things, or is Europe allowing a Romanian perspective of things.

In terms of the development regarding family values, Romania is rather worried about the latest developments in the EU. There is little confidence in the (Western-) European Family Values system as things currently stand.

The conference showed the overwhelming majority of Romanian people are in favour of moving in the direction of Healthy Marriage and Family Values, thus following the Croatian example and inscribing the right Family Values (True Family Values) into their Constitution.

Human Trafficking and other crimes against the dignity of human beings can be fought most efficiently, when a society respects right Family Values and Traditions.

There is a need for all institutions and organizations that promote right Family Values (True Family Values), to work together with the purpose of creating a society based on lasting marriages and families under the Blessing umbrella of our Heavenly Parent! (One Family under God!)

Heiner Handschin

UPF, Permanent Representative and Director Office for UN relations, Geneva