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South East Europe and the fight against trafficking in Human Beings: Challenges ahead

A delegation of Christian organisations active in the fight against trafficking in human beings visited Bulgaria from the 14th to the 18th of October in order to foster cooperation – both in Bulgaria and among neighbouring countries in South East Europe. The visit was part of the activities of the European network, “Christian Action and Networking against Trafficking in Women” (CAT).

The delegation, composed of representatives of the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe, Caritas Europa and the Romanian Forum for Refugees and Migrants-ARCA, met with the following: representatives of governmental institutions active in child protection, La Strada, the International Organisation for Migration, as well as church-related and secular organisations active in this field. They shared first-hand information about the social and legal framework of anti-trafficking in Bulgaria.

Torsten Moritz, coordinator of the CAT project explained: “When it comes to trafficking in Human Beings, South East Europe is seen as a region at high risk. While this is certainly true, it is also important to underline the growing number of high quality initiatives carried out in the region over the last years. Governments have often been very eager to develop policy plans to combat trafficking. Churches and NGOs are very active on the ground”.

Legislation against trafficking in Human Beings has reached good standards. However, effective enforcement of this legislation, lack of funding and clear sharing of tasks and responsibilities remain important challenges ahead.

Discussions during the visit underlined how partners in the country can profit from enhanced cooperation and exchange of knowledge and working methods.

The visiting delegation and the Bulgarian partners (Caritas Bulgaria and Catholic Relief Service) developed initial concepts about a more structured cooperation between civil society actors in Bulgaria and with different actors in neighbouring countries.

“What is needed at this stage is an effective coordination of the different efforts as well as a coherent implementation of legislation”, said Torsten Moritz. “Civil society has an important role to play in this process”, he added.

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