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Shocking sentence: Judge lets human traffickers off the hook

Transnational trafficking for purposes of prostitution, pimping and organized crime – these are the offences three men and three women had to take responsibility for in court last week. They had forced 31 Bulgarian women into prostitution. The case was considered a huge blow against trafficking in women by the media last fall. Now criminal proceedings have come to an end and a sentence was spoken: One woman was sentenced to 12 months, one man to 14 months of imprisonment. In both cases ten months were imposed as a conditional sentence by the judge. The remaining sentence to imprisonment was considered as already served during pre-trial custody. Therefore, the offenders are on the loose. Three offenders were sentenced to 15 to 30 months, mostly imposed as conditional sentences as well. Only one man – a recidivist – was sentenced to four years of imprisonment. The offenders applauded as this light sentence was spoken by the jury senate.

„The sentence is surprisingly light. It is incomprehensible that sentences were imposed as conditional, especially considering the fact that one of the victims is intellectually challenged and another victim is a minor“, says the victims’ lawyer Elisabeth Vlasaty. „The sentence does not at all take into account the suffering victims had to endure. The outcome of the case is even less comprehensible considering that the police carefully investigated and provided well documented evidence.“

„Trafficking in women is played down and treated as a trivial offence“, states Evelyn Probst, coordinator of the Intervention Centre for Trafficked Women in Vienna. „There is good reason to fear now, that the offenders become active again. „Also, I am worried that these kinds of sentences will not only encourage other traffickers, but demonstrate victims that their testimonies are worthless...“ Probst continues: „Five victims came back to Austria only to be able to give testimony in court. The offenders know them and know what they stated in court. They also know, where these women live now“. Counsellors of LEFO-IBF now have to prepare the victims for the possibility of encountering their offenders at any moment, Probst charges. „These women were exposed to massive violence and must now fear for their safety...“

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