

Romanian consents to extradition on human trafficking charges

Claudia Calleja

A Romanian man is expected to be sent home to face charges of paedophilia and trafficking in women for prostitution purposes after he consented to the extradition.

Marius Vamanu, 31, is wanted by Romanian authorities for allegedly forcing women, some of them minors, into prostitution after they were sent to the Netherlands on the promise that they would work as dancers.

Mr Vamanu, who was living in Siema, appeared before Magistrate Joseph Apap Bologna yesterday after the police arrested him on Monday at Malta International Airport, minutes before he boarded a plane to Ireland with a female friend.

Police Inspectors Mario Cuschieri and Chris Galea Scannura said Mr Vamanu was

arrested on the strength of a European arrest warrant, issued by Romania's Botosani court, on grounds that he was wanted for "trafficking in human beings, the sexual exploitation of children and child pornography" between 2002 and 2003.

After asking for a brief adjournment of the court sitting to consult his lawyers - Ian Farrugia and Aaron Mifsud Bonnici - Mr Vamanu gave his consent to his extradition but insisted he was not guilty of the charges brought against him. His lawyers also asked the magistrate to communicate this plea of innocence to the Romanian court.

Senior Council to the Republic Donatella Frendo Dimech, who headed the prosecution together with another lawyer Elaine Rizzo, from the Attorney General's office, objected to the request and argued that under extradition law the magistrate was not

required to go into the merits of the case.

The magistrate ordered that a purple piece of luggage registered in Mr Vamanu's name and seized at the airport when he was arrested be opened in the court room. The accused claimed it was not his. When opened, the luggage turned out to contain women's items such as handbags, clothes, shoes, a hairdryer and even a soft toy.

At the end of the sitting, the court put off the case to next Tuesday when the magistrate is expected to declare that Mr Vamanu can be extradited.

When Dr Frendo Dimech asked the court to give the ruling earlier, given that Mr Vamanu had agreed to be sent back to Romania, the magistrate replied that he had other cases to see to.

Mr Vamanu will be held in police custody until Tuesday's sitting.

Malta to discuss migration and oil with Libya and Italy

Libya, Italy and Malta will hold talks next month on illegal immigration and the delineation of the continental shelf for oil exploration purposes, Foreign Minister Tonio Borg said yesterday.

The meetings were decided during talks between Dr Borg and his Libyan counterpart Al Abdel-Rahman Shalgam yesterday. Following the meeting, the government announced that tripartite meetings will be held by the end of the year and that a double taxation agreement would be signed between Malta and Libya by the end of the year.

The ministers also dealt with the thorny issue of Libya's fishing

conservation zone. When enforced in 2006, it had forced Maltese fishermen out of traditional fishing grounds.

The government yesterday again requested that Maltese boats be given a licence to operate in the zone. "The Libyan side promised to study the request according to the Libyan legislation in force in this field."

Speaking before the meeting Mr Shalgam said that the oil drilling issue was a multi-lateral issue involving Malta, Italy, Libya and Tunisia.

Speaking on illegal migration, he said that what is a problem for Malta is an "invasion" for Libya.

Meusac to help councils secure EU funding

A unit that will assist local councils and non-governmental organisations to secure EU funding will be fully operational by early next year.

Vanni Xuereb, head of the Malta-EU Steering Action Committee (Meusac), said the unit was at present providing "limited" assistance due to lack of staff.

A process of recruiting additional staff and someone to head the unit, which is run by Meusac, was underway.

The unit, Dr Xuereb said, will not only distribute information to local councils and NGOs about available funds but also help them in drawing up funding applications.

Currently, he said, the unit was operating with the support of an expert consultant on EU funding programmes. He added that once all recruitment options were

exhausted, the unit was expected to be "up and running" by January 1.

Dr Xuereb was speaking at the opening of a seminar dealing with the EU's Europe for Citizens Programme for 2007-2013, which is aimed at bringing Europe closer to its citizens and facilitate European integration.

Parliamentary Secretary Chris Said pointed out that the seminar's aim was to disseminate information about the programme to "convince those who have not yet benefited from it to realise the potential of Europe for citizens".

It was very important, Dr Said added, for Malta to fully take part in EU programmes and initiatives because it provided an opportunity for the country to implement projects that addressed local needs, and allowed stakeholders to contribute to the EU's common aims.

Trading in humans

It is estimated that as many as 700,000 women and children are moved across international borders by trafficking rings each year, according to a report issued by the European Commission in 2001.

About 120,000 women and children are trafficked into Western Europe each year, according to the Council of Europe, and 78 per cent of women victims of trafficking are from central or eastern Europe.

International non-governmental organisations estimate the numbers to be significantly higher as the global scale of human trafficking is difficult to quantify.

However, two facts are not contested: That women and children are the main victims and that trafficking is constantly on the rise.

According to the Council, over the past years there has been an increase in the number of women and children trafficked

into the EU from central and eastern European countries due to worsening of the economic situation in these countries.

The International Organisation for Migration says that common abuses experienced by trafficked persons include rape, torture, debt bondage, unlawful confinement and threats against their family or other persons close to them as well as other forms of physical, sexual and psychological violence.

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