

STATEMENT OF UTSOPI

WHORE HUNT IN BRUSSELS

YVAN MAYEUR'S TEN BAD DECISION IN THE ALHAMBRA AREA

UTSOPI, (Union des Travailleur(se)s du Sexe Organisé(e)s pour l'Indépendance) is the first association gathering sexworkers in Belgium. It was created in November 2015 to defend sexworkers' rights.

In a context of increased repression (especially in Saint-Josse), or even prohibition (as in Liege or Charleroi) of street and window prostitution, UTSOPI is really concerned about the authoritarian methods used by Brussels' mayor Yvan Mayeur.

Since 2012, the community authorities have pursued harassment campaigns against sexworkers in the Brussels area called Alhambra. This neighborhood, located in the city centre between the Flemish Theater, the Rue de Laeken and the Small Ring, is historically famous for its prostitution activities, encouraged by sleazy motels and small and discreet alleys, where "traditional" and transvestite prostitutes are working.

During former mayer Freddy Thielemans and then Yvan Mayeur's terms, community authorities have decided to stamp out prostitution in this very area. As a result, the Police Regulation of June 4, 2012 strictly forbids prostitution in the Alhambra area under penalty of fines going up to €250, forcing sexworkers to work on a restricted part of Boulevard d'Anvers, Boulevard Baudoin and Boulevard Albert II, where working conditions are not optimal at all (no possibilities to work during the day because of the many offices on those main streets, sleazy motels are far and prostitutes are exposed to bad weather and wind, especially during the night...)

Thanks to an action lead by Espace P, the Human Rights League and 16 prostitutes, the Council of State partly cancelled this Police Regulation in his Ruling of March 16, 2016. Indeed, the authorities used their power to fine sexworkers and their clients, which is actually a federal prerogative.

Despite the cancellation, Yvan Mayeur didn't give up on his task. On June 27, 2016, he had a new version of this Police Regulation of June 4, 2012 voted by the town council. Due to a legal trick, this adapted regulation maintains fines for sexworkers and their clients and even tends to increase them (up to €350), in virtue of two separate articles the infraction being committed by the prostitute or by their client. Those two articles were a purely formal adaptation, of course.

As a result the situation became quite chaotic in the Alhambra area. The policemen are fining again the sexworkers and their more and more scarce clients, forcing prostitutes to agree on higher risk practices to make a living. On the contrary, the police would hardly ever make the trip when sexworkers are denouncing violent behaviours. Several prostitutes are now working in parking lots or nearby parks, with all the safety and sanitary risks that those semi-clandestine conditions entail.

Facing this real « whore hunt », UTSOPI is denouncing Yvan Mayeur's 10 bad decisions:

1. A « bulldozer » policy against sexworkers. In Saint-Josse, mayor Emir Kir wanted to limit in vain prostitutes' time windows. In Brussels, Yvan Mayeur went even further as his Police Regulation strictly forbids prostitution in the Alhambra area.

2. Disregard towards sexworkers. In Schaerbeek, mayor Bernard Clerfayt has established a constructive relation with UTSOPI and other field associations. On the contrary Yvan Mayeur is acting alone, without establishing any kind of discussion. UTSOPI representatives have already sent two letters to Brussels' mayor in order to fix a meeting but they remained unanswered.

3. A city where poor people are not allowed. Sexworkers working in the Alhambra area are often among the poorest people. According to Yvan Mayeur's vision of the city, there is no more place for this precarious and socially excluded population

4. Almighty rich. Sexworkers from the Alhambra neighbourhood are destroying the elitist vision of a posh city, mainly designed for the upper middle class, tourists and rich people.

5. As for the pedestrian area, Yvan Mayer act first and thinks after. First, the mayor applied an illegal regulation, and then pretended to respect the partial cancellation of the Council of State while pursuing his "whore hunt" without offering any other alternative to them.

6. Electoralism. The mayor's behaviour is only lead by one goal: seduce his new electorate composed of the rich people from the Alhambra area.

7. Criminalisation of sexworkers. Yvan Mayeur is speaking of prostitution only in negative terms (night din, constant comings and goings in the neighbourhood, drug traffic, etc.) while the great majority of sexworkers has nothing to do with those problems, that have even diminished in the last months.

8. Sexworkers as scapegoat. The discrimination made by community authorities against sexworkers has consequences on the field. Several coffees, recently established in the area and with richer customers, are strictly forbidding sexworkers who want to take a break to enter their establishment, even if they are wearing casual outfits. So to say the majority. What a beautiful example of discrimination!

9. Double Face. On the one hand, Yvan Mayeur is pleading for a « coordinate approach » of prostitution on the regional level, but on the other hand he is the first to take decisions alone without even debating with his colleagues his repressive measures while they can have an important impact on the nearby communes (as this is the case when sexworkers decide to leave Brussels and move to Schaerbeek or Saint-Josse).

10. Yvan Mayeur's very unsocialist choices. The mayor is protecting rich people at the expense of the poor ones. He doesn't care about sexworkers' well-being, because they are simply excluded from his vision of the city.

Once more UTSOPI is asking to meet Yvan Mayer. **Will the mayor of Brussels ignore the voice of the prostitutes once more? (*)**

(*) In several months on the field, UTSOPI has already met several political personalities such as Bernard Clerfayt or Emir Kir, Julien Uyttendaele, member of parliament in Brussels for PS , representatives of Minister of Women Rights and Equal Opportunities for the Brussels Region Isabelle Simonis as well as the Brussels Observatory for Prevention and Safety.

Le collectif UTSOPI

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