

Bratislava, 16 July 2007

Dear Mr
Tomáš Kurtanský
Editor-in-chief of
Hospodárske noviny
ECOPRESS, a.s.
P.O.Box 35
Seberíniho č. 1
820 07 Bratislava

Dear Editor-in-chief,

On behalf of the Civil Association Odysseus I object to the article “Non-existing children” written by the editor Jozef T. Schön. At the same time I ask you to regard this letter as a complaint against the above-mentioned editor for the unprofessional, false and distorting article which Mr. Schön has published, and I ask you to publish this letter in full extent.

Prior to the arguments against the published facts I would like to introduce our civil association briefly. We have been working with the persons using drugs and sex workers since 1998 and during these years our organization has achieved a high credit not only in Slovakia but also abroad where we participate in several projects and also work in an advisory body at the level of the European Union. Every year we are addressed by the journalists from different media to express a professional and well-founded opinion on the topics such as sex-business or drug abuse. In this way the media obtain a professional opinion and editors-in-chief avoid being confronted by such official complaints against their subordinates.

The article “Non-existing children“ that we could read in Hospodárske noviny is written in the spirit of disdain towards the people working in sex-business. These people are depicted as pathological creatures that would do anything to get drugs. If Mr. Schön aimed to write an objective and truthful article, first of all, prior to writing it he should have emotionally come to terms with the topic of sex business, study professional materials and articles, gather information for example from our or any other organization dealing with this issue. And as I believe, the article would have been written in another tone. However, nothing of that happened and therefore the published article does not solve any social problem, it only “kicks“ the people working in sex-business and foists a purposefully negative image of these people on readers.

Should we discuss the mentioned facts, apart from the significantly negative emotional tone, we will discover a lot of false information.

We would like to know how the editor, just as he began, got the secure number of 17 children “who never existed for this state...” Even the people from the organizations that deal for example with the people working in sex-business would not dare to estimate the exact number of the people working in sex-business. Therefore the certainty with which the editor uses the number is hard to understand.

It is also surprising that the editor not once mentioned the name and organization for which the young female streetworker, who obviously provided him with an „expert“ opinion, allegedly works. The term “streetworker” is not a correct term and above all if she is a source to which the editor refers, it would be appropriate to state such a source. This “streetworker” did not only break the ethical code for social workers but she also provided such “expert” information that any organization would surely terminate any cooperation with her. To tell about people that they “deliver like cats“ and that “their genitals are unobstructed due to the opiates“ is not only unethical but, first and foremost, it is a lie. I would ask Mr. Schön to state his sources of the expert opinion as it certainly would be useful for us to learn about the parallel between the opiate-taking and unobstructed genitals ... If the opiates worked, the gynaecologists might like to use them in their practice.

It is also terrible to mislead the readers that the people working in sex-business do not deliver in hospitals. Many of our clients gave birth at least once, and regardless of the drug taking they delivered in hospital – mainly in the Hospital of St. Cyril Method in Antolska Street in which they focuses just on the mothers who take drugs. To depict these women as the women who would sell their child easily or who provide their sexual services even after „the amniotic fluid flew off and their child could be dead“ suggests that the editor has really wild imagination but the statements lack any facts or evidence proving them.

I would like to inform Mr. Schön that the heroin sold in Slovakia is mostly of brown colour not white, which he could have easily verified eg. on the Internet. Unfortunately, the people who do not have any information could easily believe the article about the poor non-existing children and dreadful monsters, their mothers – the drug-addicts and prostitutes.

The reportage from the so-called Pentagon mentioned in the article might have been interesting. But it is impossible to get into this house without the chip opening the entrance door and without somebody who really lives in the house or rather in the block. Therefore we can hardly understand why the editor if he got so far, did not bring more interesting information, possibly photos from this place. Thus, it is again only the information that he could make up at any time. As a matter of fact, it is interesting that if the policemen and social workers come to Pentagon so often, just Mr. Schön was so lucky to get to the non-existing children and their mothers. Even in order to get into this space, he would need a fair amount of trust of one of the locals and I doubt he bought it for two 200 Slovak crowns.

Another critical point in the whole article is the use of Mr. Kuffa from Žakovce at Poprad. Without dispute, Mr. Kuffa is doing a good job but I do not understand why the man in Poprad should know anything about the people working in sex-business in Bratislava, or rather about their allegedly concealed children. I have the feeling that the name of Mr. Kuffa was used on purpose to make the article look at least a little credible. I would like to advice Mr. Schön to use the Internet and obtain the information how simple it is to arrange an identity card should anyone lose it... The loss of the identity card does not mean that the person ceases to exist for the state. Although it is true that for the certain groups of people arranging of new documents when lost or stolen means a high-threshold service as they lack the information where it can be arranged or the financial resources to arrange such documents.

I have the last question for the editor: after allegedly having seen the „non-existing „children, did he inform of this fact and place of location the relevant Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family? If not, he cannot be surprised that theses offices do not know about these children as, to all appearances, only Mr. Schön managed to get to them...

I am, indeed, sorry that the journalistic ethics in Slovakia is a vague conception. Therefore I would be glad if you as the editor-in-chief of Hospodárske noviny admitted that the above-mentioned article by Mr. Schön is written unprofessionally, lacking any valid information and at the same time published our negative standpoint on this article. I am convinced that it is in the interest of Hospodarske noviny to provide its readers with truthful information and not to humiliate the personality and life of the people who need our help.

Should you have any questions, I am available at the telephone number 02/52 49 43 44 or 0907 197 517, or at the e-mail address: podchod@ozodyseus.sk.

Yours faithfully

Mgr. Ľubica Tornóczyová
Programme Coordinator

The standpoint is supported by:

Civil association Prima, Bratislava

Feministic educational and publication project Aspekt, Bratislava