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## Under New Law, France Would No Longer Be Sexual Playground of Men Like Dominique Strauss-Kahn

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by: Janice G. Raymond, Truthout | News Analysis

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Dominique Strauss-Kahn's (DSK) marauding sexual behavior has passed out of the news cycle. However, in the aftermath of DSK's alleged rape of a Guinean hotel maid in New York and subsequent accusations of his rapacious pattern of behavior in France, more information about his actions has emerged. Several recent events have also challenged the French *laissez-faire* image of sexual exploitation so personified by DSK.

French women have made their voices heard, especially rejecting DSK's predatory behavior as simply the flirtatiousness of a man who defends his conduct with the



Dominique Strauss-Kahn. (Photo: Paul Taggart / The New York Times)

feeble claim, "I love women, *et alors*." Most notably, Christine Lagarde, the woman who replaced DSK as the head of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), bluntly stated that DSK's defenders were in denial when they named DSK the victim, "... while ignoring the real victim [4] and it led to unacceptable and disgusting comments by some of his friends. Male friends, of course."

Few news reports have detailed DSK's use of prostituted women and the pimping that made it possible. Police uncovered evidence that French businessmen paid for women who were delivered to DSK at clubs, restaurants and hotels in France, and elsewhere. According to Le Figaro, David Roquet, head of a subsidiary of the large construction company Eiffage, billed his company for DSK's prostitution encounters [5]. Roquet, who has been charged with pimping, told investigators that he, Lille police chief Christophe Lagarde and DSK went to the luxury Murano hotel in Paris where they engaged in "paid-for sexual relations." Roquet also testified that he spent corporate funds to fly women to Washington, DC, and New York, who took part in sex parties at DSK's request. It was reported that DSK had also used prostituted women from the same agency as Eliot Spitzer, the fallen former governor of New York. Spitzer paid for women to be brought to him across state lines and, like DSK, was never prosecuted for purchasing sex or for trafficking.

In the midst of these sordid disclosures, a major political milestone took place in the French Parliament on December 6, 2011. All political parties in the National Assembly signed a resolution that "Reaffirms the abolitionist position of France, the objective of which is ultimately a society without prostitution." Significantly, this means that France does not recognize prostitution as "sex work," nor does it support legislation legalizing brothels and pimping. Legislators resolved that legal acceptance of prostitution is incompatible with French policies that promote gender equality and human rights. In supporting the resolution, legislators spoke about the failure of legalized prostitution systems in other European countries, which have become magnets for organized crime, and encourage violence against women.

The cross-party resolution was a follow-up to a yearlong French parliamentary information mission that heard testimony from various groups and individuals relating to prostitution law reform in France. Author and historian, Malka Marcovich, who testified at the hearings, remarked that the strong report of the committee "shows that the cultural stereotype of the French male's irrepressible sexual needs, enshrined in an archaic vision of French culture, can be opposed in the name of a revolutionary French vision of human dignity, equality and liberty."

The most far-reaching recommendation of the mission is a law proposal whereby prostitution users could face penalties of six months in jail and/or a fine of 3,000 euros. The proposed French legislation follows the model that is already in force in most of the Nordic countries, which is built on the public consensus that the system of prostitution promotes violence against women by normalizing sexual exploitation. Thus, in a society that aspires to advance women's equality, it is unacceptable for men to purchase women for sexual exploitation, whether rationalized as a sexual choice or as "sex work."

The Nordic model does not penalize the persons in prostitution, but makes resources available to them. Instead, it targets and exposes the anonymous perpetrators - the buyers, mostly men, who purchase mainly women and children for sexual services. The key to the law's effectiveness lies not so much in penalizing the men, but in removing the invisibility of the buyers and making their crimes public. Men fear being outed as prostitution users.

Criminalizing demand works. Police report that it becomes less profitable for pimps and traffickers to set up shop in countries where their customers fear the loss of their anonymity. Less profit means less prostitution and less violence against women.

If this law holding prostitution users accountable for their commercial sexual exploitation passes, France will be the first country on the Continent to penalize the demand for prostitution. Parliament has set the groundwork for a future vote on the proposal after the French elections.

Since the French parliamentary resolution, several sex clubs in Paris have been shuttered following allegations of pimping. The most prominent club closure was Les Chandelles. Regarded as the most exclusive of the 50 so-called Parisian "swingers" clubs - *club échangiste* in French - Les Chandelles appears to have been an upscale brothel with "highly organized" pimping and prostitution on the premises. Pimps recruit and provide women to the club's well-heeled men. After a long investigation, the police closed down the club on December 23, 2011.

The overall message on the club's web site is sexual seduction - DSK's favorite theme. In her now notorious words, Anne Sinclair, DSK's third wife, affirmed she was proud of her husband's sexual behavior because "It's important to seduce, for a politician." The Independent UK reported that the club was frequented by DSK, "le Grand Séducteur." [6]

If Parliament passes the law penalizing the buyers, men like DSK will face legal accountability. In the meantime, France has already declared that as a country it does not support a legal system where prostitution flourishes as a normal business, where pimps are transformed into third-party business agents and where brothel owners are decriminalized as legitimate sex entrepreneurs. This France is definitely NOT the sexual playground of Dominique Strauss-Kahn.



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