



Closing Address

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Dear conference participants,

All good things must come to an end, even such enjoyable and fascinating meetings as this one. The time has come to close the conference.

We are influenced by our environment. Sitting here today at a conference where much research has been presented, I feel like I would like to start with some statistical data.

The conference brought together 115 delegates – mainly delegates of national crime prevention authorities, representatives of the different contact points of the European Crime Prevention Network, individuals doing practical crime prevention work and crime prevention researchers – from a total of 25 different countries.

We have had a total of 7 hours of expert plenary sessions which, on a general level and from the research point of view, examined the theme of the conference, which is “Alcohol and Drug Related Crime, Violence and Disorder”. There were six work shops, of which five examined the theme of the conference by drawing together around 30 projects on “best practices”. One workshop examined questions related to best practices in crime prevention in general. The best practices projects – of which around half were candidates for the European Crime Prevention Award – were presented or otherwise covered more or less in detail, either in the plenary sessions or in the work shops.

The aim of the conference was to offer a platform where the best European crime prevention theory and practices can meet and where the central stage was given to the exchange of experiences and knowledge. I would say that we have succeeded in this.

The presentations during the conference, both in the plenary sessions and in the work shops, have probably shown to everyone the many different ways in which alcohol and drugs are connected to crime, violence and disorder. I am happy to say that at this conference people did not get stuck in pointless arguing over whether and in which way alcohol and drugs are the cause of crime, violence

and disorder. From the point of view of crime prevention, the factor which should be influenced in order to reduce or prevent crimes is the cause of the crime. The knowledge and projects presented at the conference show the various ways in which we can reduce crime, violence and disorder (1) by influencing alcohol and drugs, (2) by influencing those who use them, or (3) by influencing the situations in which alcohol and drugs are used.

Listing the lectures learnt from a conference like this is always subjective. Personally I would like to suggest the following:

As a consequence of their illegality or their illegal status, drugs have been in the European political spotlight for a long time. Compared to this, alcohol has not received the attention which it should have. Alcohol is an intoxicant which brings with it many health and social problems as well as crime, violence and disorder. The European Union is slowly waking up to the fact that far too much alcohol is consumed in Europe. The drinking habits of the Europeans are becoming more uniform. This often means that in addition to drinking habits that are regulated by tradition, new drinking habits are being embraced. It can therefore be expected that also those countries which traditionally have had lesser problems with crime, violence and disorder related to drinking habits will be confronted with new problems. At the same time, the changing drinking habits indicate that the drinking culture can be changed.

Approximately half of the projects presented during the conference have been projects aimed at young people. Clearly, there is reason to be concerned about intoxicant use among young people. Drug and alcohol experiments started at an early age are some of the risk factors that are related to later criminality. The projects that have been presented at our conference show many ways in which we can prevent this. We have benefited from good guidance on how to do it. I would especially like to emphasise the lessons learnt from this years ECPA winner which question the traditional prevention campaigns.

The second lesson learned that I would like to highlight are crimes that are brought along with alcohol and drug dependency, and how to prevent such crimes. It may sound self-evident that these crimes cannot successfully be reduced without influencing the dependency itself and those reasons why dependency leads to criminality. Many good models have been presented during this conference which can achieve visible changes.

One conference can not cover all the aspects of an issue as wide as Alcohol and Drug Related Violence, Crime and Disorder. For example violence related to bars and other drinking establishments could in itself have been enough as a conference topic. The theme is interesting already because of its significance. Restaurants or the night-time economy as it is sometimes called

are strongly related to violence and disorder problems in our cities. Secondly, there is a wide variety of good practices on how the problem can be reduced. We have heard examples of this as well. Thirdly, the problem reminds us of the importance of partnership and co-operation between the public and private sector: the problems of the night-time economy can most successfully be reduced through co-operation between the authorities and the businesses.

Dear colleagues,

Finland has always had a strong interest in crime prevention, and we are proud of our research and our practice in this field. As the current holder of the Presidency of the European Union, we have wanted to support practical work in crime prevention in general. The fact that this is one of the select few conferences organized by the Ministry of Justice should be evidence of this.

In Finland, we also recognize that need to learn from our colleagues in other countries, and thus we strongly support the work of such practical networks as the European Crime Prevention Network. We support the strengthening and professionalisation of the Network, as called for in the Hague Programme.

In line with this goal of learning from one another, I am happy to note that the material of the conference will be published on the internet. It can be found from or through the EUCPN website. All the presentations, project descriptions as well as the lessons learned and the suggestions from the work shops can be found online.

The main task of the EUCPN is to provide information on the best crime prevention practices in our Member States. I would like to close up the conference by saying that the conference has increased our knowledge on how alcohol and drug-related crime, violence and disorder can successfully be prevented and that the conference has gone a long way towards delivering this knowledge to the Member States so that they can apply it in practice.

I would like to thank all the participants at the conference but especially those who, in (often) temporary project organisations and along with their daily work, tackle local crime problems and make the main ground work for developing safer European living conditions. It is from this work that we can filter the best crime prevention practices which we can recommend be applied elsewhere. Your work will help to prevent crime throughout the European Union and beyond, to the benefit of our citizens and our communities.

For this, and on behalf of the Presidency of the European Union, I would like to thank you and wish you continued success in your work.