

Speech at the European Crime Prevention Award Ceremony

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Honourable Mayors, ladies and gentlemen and especially the excited nominees for the European Crime Prevention Award!

We Finns – if anyone – know what a triumph it is to win an international cultural competition. Finland has entered the Eurovision Song Contest every year since 1961, except for the years we have been excluded from the contest due to especially poor success. We have always participated in the contest with big hopes and, in our opinion, a sure winner. 39 times the result has been a disappointment. A country could lose its national dignity for less! We Finns have considered our country to be a song country and as you probably know, even our national epic is based on songs. This year Lordi and Hard Rock Hallelujah changed everything. Finally we got to experience the thrill of victory. I doubt if the Finnish EU Presidency would have been started with such confidence without this victory.

The Eurovision Song Contest analogy is not so far-fetched. Also the contest to find the best European crime prevention project is most of all a cultural competition. Crime prevention and promotion of public security is a cultural task, and culture plays an important role in prevention of crime. To back up my argument I merely state, that there might be a number of ways to influence criminality at least in the short term, but luckily our culture does not approve of them. When the European Crime Prevention Award contest was established one of the main criteria set for the projects was that the crime prevention project must not adversely affect the quality of life. I believe that this principle emphasising the value of the quality of life still applies.

We promote our culture by ensuring that our cultural values, in particular different civil liberties protected by criminalisation, are not violated. I don't need to tell you that to achieve this it is better to prevent crime than punish it.

Culture can be of great instrumental significance when it comes to preventing crime. About ten years ago the Danish cross-ministerial child committee published a study on culture as the core of preventive work. The analysis of twelve successful projects – including even circus groups – showed a number of channels for influence. Cultural projects are a way to bring out the hidden creative power of children and young people and give socially disadvantaged children and youth a new status in a group. They can reduce social inequality amongst those who participate and active participation in cultural activities also motivates children and young people to improve their skills. When young people take responsibility for their own cultural activities, it increases their understanding of the importance of cooperation and consideration for others.

Cultural contests are often criticised, and it is not so rare that musicians, authors or movie directors refuse to participate. On the other hand, cultural contests seem to have a great significance when it comes to making music, literature or movies known. The Finlandia Prize, awarded annually to the author of the best Finnish novel, increases the sales of both the winning novel and the nominees, and thus promotes reading of literature. Many musicians, authors and directors have become known through contests. Not many people outside Finland knew what Lordi was before they won the Eurovision Song Contest.

One of the main goals of EUCPN is to make good practices in the field of crime prevention known. I hope this contest will be as successful in fulfilling this goal as, for instance, the Finlandia Prize in promoting good literature in our country or international cultural contest in making local talents internationally known.

Within the EU everything is selected by competition. In this contest the winner is of course best crime prevention project. According to my knowledge there were 13 nominated projects, from which the jury had to choose a winner. I assume the jury consisted only of lawyers. That is why I, as the official supervisor of this contest and before I give the floor to the chairman of the jury, must remind you, that in 2001 the European Parliament adopted the resolution on the particular role and position of certain liberal professions, in particular lawyers, in modern society. The Parliament underlines the importance of professional rules ensuring the impartiality, competence, integrity and responsibility of members of the liberal professions, so as to guarantee the quality of services and uphold the public interest. I am convinced that the jury has made its decision in the spirit of the European competition policy.