

Dear Colleagues, Welcome to The Hague!

It is a great pleasure to have the opportunity to make some opening remarks at the 12th European Conference. In the next 2 days you will hear everything you always wanted to know about 'Guns, Gangs and Hooligans'.

The Hague is called "the legal capital of the world" and "the city of Peace and Justice". It hosts a lot of international institutes concerning international safety and justice. It must be so secure that you dared to come to The Hague to speak about such threats for a peaceful society as guns, gangs and hooligans.

In The Netherlands you're not allowed to have 'guns', unless you have a license. In the last 20 years 4.327 got killed in the Netherlands (source: Elsevier, January 28, 2012). Most people were stabbed or shot. In 1992, the first year the Dutch newsmagazine 'Elsevier', made a resume of 'murder' 262 people was killed. In 2012 it has dropped to 103 last year (2011). 55 of the 103 were shot! Our "top-killer" was a young man, who lived in my region. He shot 6 persons more or less at random near and in a shopping center in Alphen aan den Rijn (and killed himself shortly hereafter). He had a license for 3 firearms/guns. After that event the question was, as it always is after such a drama took place: "How could this happen?" At this moment at least 5 reports are issued and the 6th one is coming. You might think: "a good drama is a joy for every committee in this area". The first organization to blame was the police: how was it possible that this young man had a license for any gun? In the Netherlands the police authorities give the license after a short inquiry. "Was that inquiry good enough?" The answer was "no" after research. The young man had mental problems before and the police refused the license first, but allowed it a few years later without knowing/recognizing the earlier refusal. The other organization to blame was the mental health care. They knew he had a problem. They knew he didn't take his medicine. They knew his parents were concerned about his wish to get licensed guns, but he was 18+. So they didn't make any contact with the police. It was a secret between doctor and an adult patient. You're not allowed to speak about these things, unless other people's lives are in danger. How could we know? The inspection on medical health care has reported that in this case 'keeping the secret' was not the best choice. And what was the political reaction? New regulations are required! Police must do better inquiries!

Gangs are a phenomenon that we scarcely see in The Netherlands. Criminal Youth Groups are counted every year. In 2010 the police reported 89 criminal youth groups in the Netherlands in total. 16 of those 89 were in this region. Maybe because of that I am in charge for The Prosecution Service of the Netherlands to terminate those 89 criminal groups. I must have reached that result in 2013: none of these groups are allowed to exist then, unless there is a plan to make these youngsters worthwhile members of our society. And now something strange occurs. In a lot of regions, including the 2 biggest cities of the Netherlands, almost all criminal youth groups of 2010 vanished. The police no longer report their presence. Were the police activities that great? Did a miracle take place? Has God come to these places and altered everything?

Or are they anticipating on the political wish to see a good result? In The Hague we have counted more criminal youth groups in 2011, than in 2010. For almost all these group members an approach is made. Are we nuts to report an increase? Or are we the only ones who see what actually happens on the streets of our city?

The only groups that may count as ‘gangs’ in the Netherlands are maybe clubs like “the Hell Angels” and/or “Satudarah”. A lot of investigations have taken place about these groups: drug trafficking, extortion, murders, theft... name it. Some (in the past) were not a success for the prosecution service. Others led to convictions. Some investigations are still going on. The chairmen of these clubs deny every accusation. Is “presumed innocent” an inviting approach?

Hooligans are no longer a real problem in The Hague. Our football team ADO The Hague has a new stadium, near the freeway, far from the neighborhoods where people live. In the old days, the hooligans of ADO had some reputations. Now most of them have become businessmen. They have their own skybox.

If you want to see real hooligans you have to go to Rotterdam South, nearby “De Kuip”, the stadium of “Feyenoord”. Not last Sunday: after many years Feyenoord defeated archrival Ajax. Everyone in Rotterdam was full of joy: no hooliganism occurs.

In the previous season there were a lot of problems. Hooligans more or less behaved acceptable in the stadium. The problems occurred outside the stadium. When they present their selves as hooligans in the center of Rotterdam, in bars or in the shopping area. The ordinary visitors of the center feel threat. They want to get away. We had a real problem at a party in Hoek van Holland on August 22, 2009. A young man was killed. A bullet from a police gun through his head ended this live. A lot of violence happened that evening. At first some hooligans hit innocent people just to see how many policemen would react. When they found out they had a majority an older hooligan approached a policemen he knew and said to him: “the police can better disappear; otherwise some of you can get killed”. Was this a threat or just a good advice? The police didn’t leave. Hooligans recognized a few policemen and started to attack them. The policemen took their guns and shot in the air. Other policemen came and saved their colleagues. They left the feast area and closed the fence. For a moment they felt save. Shortly hereafter hooligans came after them. A lot of policemen were afraid. More than 400 bottles filled with sand were thrown towards the policemen by the hooligans. Many of the policemen took their guns and shot. Finally a group of 6 policemen on horses came running their horses in between hooligans and the police. That action made the difference. The police had time to take their place in a proper way and hooligans got afraid of the horses and ran away.

After this drama everyone asked: how could this happen? Who is to blame? Inquiries took place, reports were issued and ... hooligans still exist.

I wish you a very interesting conference in this beautiful city: enjoy the peace and justice for all!

Henk Korvinus