

NEWS FROM THE PRESIDENT - SEPTEMBER 2014

My first contact with the IAP was the second European regional conference in The Hague twelve years ago; the topic was juvenile delinquency. Before that event I had little experience in the international field. Comparative criminal law was not taught at my university (or any other in Austria at the time) and the professional contacts that I had with prosecutors from other countries were restricted to Germany, Slovakia and Hungary. To say it in short, what I knew about prosecutorial work outside of my little country was next to nothing! Then came the conference in The Hague and within twenty minutes of our regional conference I learned, that Scotland has its own judiciary system, which is independent from England and Wales and from Northern Ireland. I learned some funny sounding titles (no offence meant; ours aren't much better) and what the respective roles of prosecutors and the police are. Then I learned the most shocking fact: the age of criminal responsibility in other countries can - under certain circumstances - be less than half the age we have in Austria or Germany (14 years). Like most humans I fell for a very simple mistake: Having invested many years in my legal training at University and at the courts, I was more or less convinced that „my“ system was basically the best. How ignorant I was then! Within two days at this conference my legal horizon wasn't only broadened a little, it now started to expand over huge parts of Europe. What helped, was to discuss a case, the murder of James Bulger in 1993. All participants had to think through, how their respective systems would have dealt with two ten year old suspects. In my country, a family court judge would have to choose between several possibilities to better control and help with their education. But this judge would act alone, without prosecution or defence. In several other jurisdictions there would be a real criminal trial with the benefit of prosecution and defence. In the end the judge (or jury) in these systems would have basically the same possibilities to deal with the accused children as in my own. But the verdict would follow a modern trial with all rights for the defendants safeguarding that the proceedings follow the principles of the rule of law.

My point is not that a criminal trial against juvenile defendants is generally the better solution than any kind of family court. My point is, that I learned to respect different solutions to similar problems and that maybe there are better solutions out there and that we could adopt them to tackle problems in our system. Besides, I found out that being together with colleagues from other countries is not only rewarding in the sense that you find future contact points in case you need them. It is rewarding in itself, because we had stimulating discussions - and great fun.

Attending this conference changed my professional life forever. I started to attend other IAP conferences and my circle of friends from around the world still keeps growing. Every single presentation and discussion contains some new advice or piece of information, every new contact helps me to better understand what our profession is really about. I'm still not tired of this, on the contrary, otherwise I wouldn't be writing this message from the President. I'm still learning from my colleagues all over this planet. And I hope that I can help others to share this great experience. The IAP is all about this experience. At its conferences, the Prosecutor Exchange Program, its publications and in the virtual world on our websites.

The next time the IAP family meets in real life will be this November in Dubai. We expect around 500 prosecutors from around 100 countries to attend and share the experience. I would be glad if you, dear reader, will attend as well.